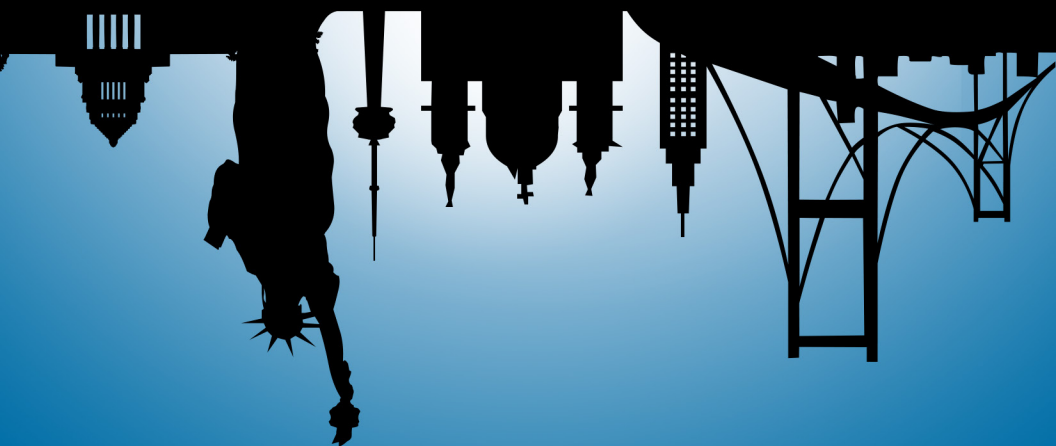




STRAIGHT TALK

THE WAY I SEE IT

FALAH SHAMS



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Dedicated to

My wife, Zahida, who inspired me to compile this for my children. They have the burden of carrying the torch of my faith to my grandchildren. I pray that this will help them in some way to do their job well.

Note on References

The Holy Qur'an references have been given at the end of the book via footnotes. References are given with Chapter name , chapter number and *Ruku* number. The Holy Qur'an is organized through chapters (*Surahs*), Parts (total of 30 parts) and *Rukus*. *Ruku* is equivalent to a paragraph based on the subject matter. This will give the readers an opportunity to read the particular *Ruku* of the Holy Qur'an from which the verse has been quoted. In addition to the blessings of reading the verses of the Holy Qur'an, it will give the reader understanding of the context in which referenced verse was revealed.

Salutations

Muslims follow the names of God's prophets with the prayer *alaehis salaam (as)* or 'may peace be upon him,' and for the Holy Prophet Muhammad, *sallallahu alaehi wasallam (saw)* or 'may peace and blessings of God be upon him.' Companions of prophets and righteous personalities who have passed away are saluted by *razi-Allaho anhu / anha (ra)* or 'may Allah be pleased with him/her." While such salutations sometimes are not set out in the text for readability or shown with abbreviations, we encourage readers to offer these prayers as if set out in full.

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Foreword

Muslim youth in America has many issues to face especially after 911 attacks. Attitude of Westerners has changed in many ways. Interest in Islam has brought out many pundits and “specialists” who give information about Islam and misinform the public.

Youth in America has been educated in fine universities and is well-versed in secular knowledge. On the religious knowledge arena, they have limitations. Most of their teachers, counselors, educators are from a different culture. Their response to issues raised by the Westerners are filled with Arabic terminology and confusing to American Christians and Jews, as well as to the Muslims. Majority of the Muslim youth is embarrassed by the allegations, discussions and claims about Islam in the news media.

I have made an attempt to deal with the issues that are well talked about in a simpler format without the confusing terminology and in a manner that I hope would be easy to understand. The name of the book “Straight Talk” is the translation of the Holy Qur’an words of “*Qoulay Sadeed*”. Unlike plain truth, straight talk is without play on words, clear-cut, precise and through

which the message is given in a righteous manner.

Muslim youth does not need to be embarrassed and should address the issues in the righteous manner to any pundit, specialist or any other critic of Islam. God is on the side of the righteous as he has done for centuries. His blessings will prevail.





Travel of a Century

I belong to a unique generation. Although I belong to the baby-boomer generation, being brought up in Pakistan; it was not a well-known term. I am one month older than the country of Pakistan. Being a migrant to a new country and also in a town that was being established from scratch, from barren land, it was like living in the 19th century. I can really relate to a lot of things in a cowboy movie. The lanterns with kerosene oil, cooking over burning wood and streets without asphalt were all part of my life in the early years. Then, of course, we got electricity and then natural gas, but still no indoor plumbing or television.

All of a sudden, I moved to the 20th century in the USA. It really was like going to sleep in 1866 in a small town in Nebraska and waking up in Chicago in 1966.

It was not only interesting but in a way adventurous to deal with the new culture, language, customs and even dietary differences. It is really an adventure to try to eat a hot dog for the first time let alone trying to deal with its name. Or even trying to eat cold cuts which some of us still cannot eat because

they look like raw meat.

My generation still refers to Pakistan and India as their “home”. They have lived here more years than anywhere else but it is still not home. In the conversations, we still hear the words “back home”. I lived one month in British India, a little over eighteen years in Pakistan and 50 years in USA. I know where my home is. I already bought the cemetery lot for myself here. I am here to stay.

Being brought up in a small town, discussions about religion could not be controlled because they were in our blood. Since most Americans did not know anything about Islam, it was a good icebreaker. Moreover, trying to practice the religious obligations is always a tough task, especially when the hippie movement and the sex revolution are going on. You have to be on guard 24 hours a day.

Over a long period of time, since 1966, my knowledge and thinking about Christians, Jews, Hindus and even Muslims has evolved. Without compromising with the basic roots of Islamic teachings, the interaction with others and approach to solving the common social and political issues is altogether different. I consider it improved.

Dealing with our society is a different matter for the children of our generation. They have been a part of this society since their birth. We like to talk in Urdu, Punjabi or in another ethnic language we feel easy with. English is something we deal with because of necessity. It does not matter how well we have learned the language or how comfortable we feel using it. When it comes to singing, counting and cursing, there is nothing that gives you satisfaction as your mother tongue. Our children don't have that problem; their mother tongue is English even if their biological mom is not comfortable with it.

My generation supported their parents financially, provided education for their children and made arrangements for their siblings and other relatives to come to this country so they could avail themselves of the opportunities here. We were the Social Security system for our families.

The Americans call us the “Aliens” or “Foreigners” and our children refer to us as “Diz”. In case you have not heard that terminology; Diz is an abbreviation of the Urdu word De’see which means “Domestic” or “Native”. In other words, we are not Westerners.

As far as the relatives we brought to this country, they tell us how to do things better. They are the experts on the financial, political, social and religious aspects of this country. They remind me of the person getting off the boat on the shores of United States, looking back at others climbing down the stairs of the ship and remark: “Damn Foreigners!”

How our children will treat us when we are “old” is yet to be seen. They do not feel the need, responsibility or the desire to financially support us. They would not hesitate to put us in a nursing home if our situation interfered with their work or entertainment schedules. I know there are people of my generation who will give a few examples of how it is not true. I do not have a clue what the future will hold but I am a master of the obvious. I can see the present and I would like to think I am a realist. Social Security system reform is crucial for the baby-boomers.

I don’t know how the children of our next generation would be brought up. Would they be brought up by the babysitters or the tender and loving care of their mothers? Everyone in our next generation wants to be a professional

including the females; anything but a “Domestic” person. I know they will not have a language problem with their children since they would both speak English. We still have that problem. Even when we speak to our kids in Urdu, they answer back in English. Neither one of us knows for sure if the other understood what was said.

I always felt that our speeches in our religious functions are really not geared to the next generation. We like to hear quotes in Urdu and Arabic and both are Greek to our children. I sensed that the young people come to our functions mostly to please or appease their parents. They really do not relate to the material being presented. I think some of them, if not most of them, turn their ears off until it is refreshment time. I know some would disagree with my observation but as I said earlier, I like to think I am a realist.

I have written a series of articles for our young people. I have tried to put things in plain American English to get some message across to them. My speech professor in college had quoted someone as saying: “People who use big and complicated words are intoxicated with the exuberance of their own verbosity”. Mostly these are basic principles of Islam presented in a different way, hopefully even interesting to read.

I also think that over the last 50 years, my English has also improved. After reading these articles, you will appreciate how far we have come in expressing our thoughts in the English language. I know you will agree with me especially if I told you the story of a fellow student in my first semester of college. It is actually an old joke.

A foreign student fell in love with the teacher and was trying to find a way to express himself. He bought a flower and gave it to the teacher. He said, “The smell of this flower will

fade and die, but Mrs. Johnson, you will smell forever.”

I don't care if you think my writing is humorous or serious as long as you read it.

Good luck with the 21st century!





All Inclusive Thanksgiving

We thank God for letting us have the parents who brought us up with tender loving care. Our parents who are still living, we pray for them that God gives them a long healthy life and the ones who have deceased; we pray that God forgive them and with His mercy, shower them with His blessings in the best stages of heaven.

We thank God for giving us offsprings who follow the truth and glorify their Lord. And we pray in the words that the Holy Qur'an has taught us: "Our Lord, grant us of our wives and children the delight of our eyes, and make us a model for the righteous."¹

We thank God for giving us the opportunity to live in a country where life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are honored. Where we practice our religion in freedom and honor our Lord without limitations.

We thank God for providing us the opportunities to offer sacrifices for His cause. And we respond in the words of Prophet Abraham^{as}: "O Allah, show us the places and the ways

we can sacrifice for You even more.”²

We thank Allah for letting us be one of the believers and we say in the words of Prophet Solomon^{as}: “My Lord, grant me the will and power to be grateful for thy favor which hast bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to do such good works as would please Thee, and admit me, by Thy mercy, among Thy righteous servants.”³

We thank God for protecting us from the wrongdoers so many times and we pray in the words of Prophet Abraham’s people: “Our Lord, in Thee do we put our trust and to Thee do we turn repentant, and towards Thee is the final return. Our Lord, make us not a trial for those who disbelieve and forgive us our Lord for Thou art the Mighty, the Wise.”⁴

We thank God for forgiveness of our sins and weaknesses and we pray in the words of Prophet Noah^{as}: “My Lord forgive me and my parents and him who enters my house as a believer and the believing men and the believing women and increase Thou not the wrongdoers but in perdition.”⁵

We thank God for showing his signs in our times to show the difference among us and the rebellious people and we pray in similar words to that of Prophet Moses^{as} to see more signs: “My Lord, I have power over none but myself and my brother, therefore, make thou a distinction between us and the rebellious people.”⁶

We thank God for all the favors he has done for us which, due to our own limitations, cannot even comprehend; many of which are in the works without even our knowledge.

We thank Allah for giving us the knowledge to recognize Him, as the Holy Qur’an points out: “Who created

the heavens and the earth, and who sent down water for you from the sky where with We cause to grow beautiful orchards. You could not cause their trees to grow. Is there a God besides Allah? Nay, they are a people who deviate from the right path.

Or Who made the earth a place of rest and placed rivers in its midst, and placed upon it firm mountains, and put a barrier between the two waters. Is there a God beside Allah? Nay, most of them know not.

Or Who answers the distressed person when he calls upon Him, and removes the evil, and makes you successors in the earth. Is there a God besides Allah? Little is it that you reflect.

Or Who guides you in every kind of darkness of the land and of the sea, and Who sends the winds as glad tidings before His mercy. Is there a God besides Allah? Exalted is Allah above what they associate with Him.”⁷

Finally, we state and acknowledge that all kinds of praise belongs to God, the Lord of all the worlds, the Gracious, Beneficent and the Merciful, the Master of the Day of Judgment. Him alone do we worship and Him alone do we implore for help. We pray that He guides us in the right path, the path of those on whom He has bestowed His blessings, Those who have not incurred his displeasure and those who have not gone astray. Amen.⁸





The Pursuit of Happiness

A man went to his Pastor and described the problems he was having in his life. How he was suffering from everyday problems and issues. He went into details of his issues with his wife, children and friends. Then he described the problems at his job and the conditions of the economy in the country and the political turmoil in the world. The man just wanted a peaceful life. He wanted a solution so he does not have to deal with all these worries and headaches. He asked the pastor where he could go to find peace. After all, being the pastor and a man of God, he should be able to guide him to a place of peace and tranquility.

The pastor responded by saying that he did know of a place where he could be at peace. He also said that if the man wanted, he could drive him there. So the pastor got him in his car and after a short drive stopped at a cemetery and told the man there is the place where you would have complete peace from all your afflictions.

We want to get away from our problems and wish for peace, happiness and describe our desire in many different

ways. We really don't know what we want except get away from the issues at hand. We want to be happy.

Fact is that happiness and sadness is part of life. Existence of one is only absence of the other. We cannot feel one without the other. A child is borne and we are happy. A dear one departs from this world and we feel sadness. We get a new client or customer and that makes us happy. We lose a client and sadness spreads throughout the firm. These conditions continue to exist in our lifetime while their duration maybe different among different individuals. We keep on asking the question, "Why me?" The answer is "Why not you?"

There is no such thing as continual happiness or sadness. What we can really wish for is contentment in our life. We can be content while we are happy or sad.

Our faith cannot help us with the feelings of happiness or sadness because they will occur as part of the course. However, it can help us in being content. We need to accept that whatever comes our way will pass and we are content with the will of God. No matter what happens, our relationship with God stays strong.

The Holy Qur'an says that the contentment or comfort of heart comes through the remembrance of God. There is no other way to get those feelings of contentment unless we are in His company and conscious of His existence.

Some of us think that money will make us happy. Even if does, it is a temporary phase. Just like any feeling of sadness, it will pass. Young actors and musicians who became millionaires overnight and then overdosed on drugs are testimony to this fact. John Beluschi and Michael Jackson are just two examples of rich rising stars with no contentment. Their imagined

happiness did not last long. There was no contentment in their hearts because money cannot provide it.

Contentment also comes from doing good works that God has commanded us to do. When we help a fellow being in need, our heart feels contentment. Those feelings of contentment stay with us. Unlike happiness, these feelings are permanent and cross over to the next world and become our reward. On the other hand, when we do something just for our own individual happiness and enjoyment, it is a temporary phase. In some cases if the happiness is a result of a sinful activity, it may turn into sadness. It depends on our consciousness and our knowledge of the laws of God. Basic knowledge about good and evil is factory built in our souls.

Contentment of heart is the peace we are looking for. Blaming God for sadness in our life destroys peace in our life. Why do I always get the red light when I am driving and have to stop? Why can't it be green all the way? Why do so many people have no problems with their jobs but I struggle? Why could I not be the lottery winner? Why should I not be the one on the beach with no worries?

All these questions are raised in our minds so we can feel sorry for ourselves. They have no solutions and only corrupt our mind and make us discontent with our lives. All these worldly issues will disappear when we arrive at our destined time at the cemetery, just like the pastor pointed out.

Instead of worrying about the little stuff, we need to figure out how to give a helping hand to a poor friend, a widow or an orphan who needs help. We need to reach out to family and friends, be supportive and loving to our spouses and children. We need to give thanks to God that we are conscious of His existence. We need to acknowledge that He would be

there for us while we are happy or sad.

Everlasting contentment and peace is in His company
and friendship.





Surely, success does come to the believers, Who are humble in their Prayers, And who shun all that which is vain, And who are active in paying the Zakat, And who guard their chastity —Except from their wives or what their right hands possess, for then they are not to be blamed; But those who seek anything beyond that are the transgressors —And who are watchful of their trusts and their covenants, And who are strict in the observance of their Prayers. These are the heirs, Who will inherit Paradise. They will abide therein.

CH23 R1



Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall

Driving down route 57 in the boondocks of Illinois State, I decided to stop at the next exit. Well, it was not the kind of facility I was looking for. Most people who have driven the American highways can relate to this. You try to look in the mirror to see how you look, but the mirror doesn't cooperate. This was a mirror that had been through rough times; peeled backing and smears everywhere. I tried to find a spot on the mirror where I could find a clear image of my face, but I gave up.

I came back in the car and tried to satisfy my curiosity by looking in the rear view mirror. Well, you can only look at parts of your face at a time in the rear view mirror. After a few poses in the mirror, I was comfortable that my face was in decent enough shape that any truck driver on Hwy 57 would not object to my driving there. However, I could not wait to get to look in a mirror where there was good light and I could see myself clearly. How my hair was parted, details of the shades of color on the skin and the spots I had missed in my shaving exercise that morning. Please note that I have not mentioned anything that women go through in this course of

natural action. I frankly don't have the courage.

People have been asking the question: Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all? I wonder if we should look for the fairest mirror before this question is addressed about ourselves.

While driving, my mind started wandering around. (By the way, this is a requirement while driving in the boondocks on Hwy 57.) I started to think about the famous *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}: A Muslim is a mirror for another Muslim^A. Only three words in Arabic, but an endless amount of great wisdom.

When we look in the mirror, it quietly tells us what we need to fix, what looks bad and what looks good. The mirror does not go around the neighborhood afterwards and tell everyone, "Guess what I saw today?"

You can really trust a mirror to keep a secret.

Then, I thought, a lot depends on the quality of the mirror too. There are Muslims who are like the mirror at that exit on Hwy 57. You wouldn't be able to get any benefit from them. As a matter of fact, you may have a big spot on your face and they wouldn't tell you so others can laugh at it. Some are like the rear view mirrors. They can help you partly but you never get the whole picture. However, there are higher quality Muslims and those are the mirrors we have to look for.

In my youth, I remembered many mirrors of the highest quality. They had light around them and there was a special glow that emitted from them. It was light and it had a reflection that couldn't help but affect you. I remembered walking to the mosque with one of my elder neighbors. How he

talked, walked, smiled and looked at us is a cherished memory. How he gave you advice and guidelines to live by. This was a mirror where you saw beauty and trust. Your heart desired to keep looking at this mirror so you could capture everything.

I had mirrors like that in my father, grandfather and other elders whom I came in contact with. They all told us what we needed to fix and how to cleanse ourselves. The interesting thing is that it never bothered us. We knew that they were giving us advice because they cared for us. We knew that they were not going to be publicizing our shortcomings. We could trust them. Those are the mirrors that you want to be around.

You can tell what kind of mirror it is that you are looking into. The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}'s example is wonderful. Look for the Muslim of a high quality and use him as a mirror. This relates to the kind of company we keep. Our associates have effect on our thinking, psychology, behavior and conduct. A good person, who is our friend, will guide us to the good things in life. A bad one could care less what we do or what we look like. So it is up to us to examine and select the company we keep.

In my wandering around, I came up with another side of the wisdom in the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}'s quote. It implied that I am a mirror for other Muslims as well. Now that was a shock. If others are going to look at me as their mirror, what kind of mirror am I? To make sure that I can be a decent mirror, I would have to work hard and not disappoint others. This brought me down to the term *Jihad-I-Akber* (the greatest struggle).

Looking at other beautiful mirrors was easy, but preparing myself to something close to them, now that's a work of a lifetime. No wonder it is called the Greatest Struggle by

the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}. Instead of pointing fingers at what others are doing, I need to be thinking about what good qualities I should be working for. Am I the person that others look at as a good mirror? Can they trust me and can they expect to get some light and reflection that they can benefit from?

While on the last stretch of my drive, I started to ponder over who could be the best mirror. Of course, the best Muslim must be the best mirror. That brought me to the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}. No matter how you look at his life, whatever angle, whatever light, whatever corner, reflection of light, beauty, trust and love show up. I started to think how he treated his family, friends, children, countrymen, foreigners, men, women and even enemies. That was a mirror, which was light upon light. That is a mirror, which one can use for a lifetime.

There was no question in my mind who was the fairest of them all.

By the way, if you want to avoid that exit on Hwy 57, I can't help you because I don't remember it, but I am sure it is still there. That is something everyone must be on guard for themselves. The same is true about looking for the excellent mirrors in your life and not letting them get away from you. That could help your struggle to take their places for the next generation. No one said it was easy.

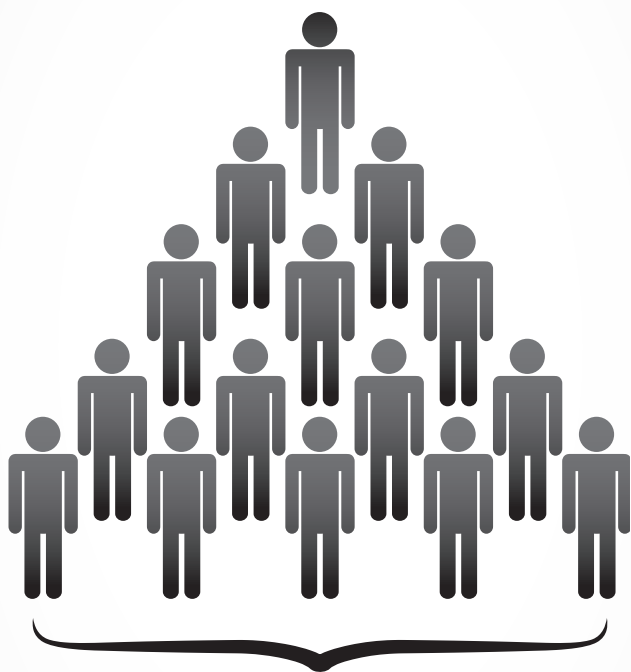
I guess that is why it is called the *Jihad-I-Akber*.





Verily, Allah enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others; and giving like kindred; and forbids indecency, and manifest evil, and wrongful transgression. He admonished you that you may take heed.

CH16 R13



Rewards Pyramid

I was seventeen and riding my bike near my house when he waved at me to stop. It was Maulvi Bashir Ahmad. Every time he talked to me I got stuck doing some community work. I stopped anyway. He said he was taking pledges for contributions for the next year. I told him to put down my usual amount of five rupees. He was not happy, but he didn't express it. He started to tell me that I should increase it from the last year.

Living in my community, I had heard all the different approaches to increase contribution for the mosque. I had also mastered the responses to these approaches because of my youth, but mostly because of necessity. (Forgive me I was only seventeen). So, I said to him that he needed to talk to my father. "Until my father changes my allowance, my pledge remains the same. After all, it is figured based on income. God knows that I try it everyday with my father, but it hasn't worked. Maybe he will listen to you."

That was a project even he was not willing to take on. I also think that he figured he would look silly having a

discussion with my father who was a respectable officeholder of the mosque about the allowance of his son. But, Maulvi Bashir was not a quitter. You would not believe how the rest of the conversation went. I swear to God that I have not made this up; it is a true rendering.

Bashir: What about the pledge from your wife?

Me: My wife? You know something that I don't? You do know that I am not married?

Bashir: I know, but you will one day.

Me: I hope so. (Notably, it was a quick response. I was too young to know the ups and downs of marriage.)

Bashir: Allah knows who she is. So if you will pledge for her, she will get the reward.

Me: Come again?

Bashir: You can pay on behalf of your prospective wife in the future. Allah knows who she is and will give her the reward.

Me: I really don't believe this conversation!

You must have realized by now that we had a lot of time on our hands. It was basically due to the lack of television sets. We had to devise our own reality sitcoms.

So he put down one rupee on behalf of my future unnamed wife. On the way home, pedaling my one speed bike, I was trying to absorb what had just happened. This was a new

one for me and something for which I had not figured out an answer. I have to tell you that Maulvi Bashir was older than I was and unmarried. I have not seen him in many years, but from what I hear, he never married. Isn't it ironic? I wonder if he made a pledge on behalf of his future wife. Now there is an accounting nightmare for the angels!

In case you don't appreciate the one rupee pledge I made for my wife, let me put it in perspective. This was long before Pakistan became an ally of the USA for the fight against terrorism. At that time, the rupee had value.

I could have gone for four days to Manan's kebab place and had four shami kebabs on each trip. Maybe you don't relate to shami kebabs. I could have gone to Rasheed's fruit shop for four days and had fresh orange juice on each trip. He made it real good with salt and pepper. Don't make any faces. You think it is easy for me to see people putting ketchup on eggs. I think it is an insult to eggs. And, no, we did not have juice at home. It was hard to keep it without a refrigerator. Anyhow, that one rupee was a large sacrifice in whomsoever name I gave it.

We have a wonderful concept of sharing rewards. You tell someone to go to the mosque and when he does, you get the reward for it. Yet, it doesn't diminish the reward from the one doing the good act. It really is a good principle for promoting good. Tell others to do good and watch your rewards grow^B. For that one rupee, I got the reward for paying it. My future wife got the reward because it was paid on her behalf. Maulvi Bashir got the reward for cooking up the whole scheme. Three for a rupee is a darn good deal.

To promote good and forbid evil is a course of action prescribed for Muslims repeatedly in the Holy Qur'an. It is essential for the survival of the society. When a person in a

society becomes evil, it affects the whole society.

One of the saying (*Hadith*) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} makes the point clear. It is reported that the Holy Prophet^{saw} said: The case of those who observe the limits set by Allah and those who are careless about them is like passengers on a ship who cast lots to see who should occupy the upper deck and who should be on the lower one and then took their places. Those who were on the lower deck passed through those of the upper deck whenever they had to fetch water. So they said to the ones on the upper deck: If we were to bore a hole through the bottom, we would not then have to trouble you. Now, if the people of the upper deck were to leave the others to carry out their desires, they would all perish together. But, if they were to stop them from carrying it out they would all be saved.^C

It is really up to the good guys on the upper deck. If they don't stop the wrong and promote goodness, the whole society will suffer. The bad guys at the lower deck just don't know what they are doing. Society is made up of both kinds of individuals. It is like when one part of the body aches, the rest of it feels it. A strong immune system is needed to fight the disease.

Promoting good and forbidding evil are the immune system of the society. Evil is the disease that must be fought with and good is the strength that needs to be promoted. This job cannot be left to just the priests, ministers, Imams and the missionaries. Everyone must get involved. The immune system is not a part of the body; it is settled throughout the body. The immune system must also be alert at all times.

I think I have done enough preaching for the day. You may not have noticed, but I have tried to promote good. Every

one of you who will do some good will get me a reward for writing these few words.

I would not even rely on the good works of others. I think I will do my good deed for the day. You know the rupee I contributed; I will not collect it from my wife. Now, this may even get me an extra reward.

I wonder if she would have paid me if I did ask her for it. It really won't do me any good. My doctor won't let me eat shami kebabs four days in a row and I've got orange juice in the fridge.





Changing the World

It happens every leap year. The election activities are everywhere on TV and in the newspapers. I am sure (at least I hope) there are others thinking the same thing as I am. If I were to become the President, what would I do and how could I change the world? How would I have treated Arafat, Saddam Hussein and deal with the situation of low average grade of students in Kentucky? (I am a detail person.) Then I think maybe that's too high a position to fantasize about. What if I were a senator or a congressman? Then I get down to the level of a mayor and even as a trustee of our township. I am not done fantasizing and the elections are over. So I wait for the next leap year.

People always spend a lot of time discussing how others should do their jobs. It holds true in any organization, even in the mosque. Members are thinking, if they were the directors of the mosque, officeholders or even the Treasurer, how they could make things happen. Some of it could be jealousy, but there is a sincere side to this as well. Why couldn't one have the opportunity of holding a position so he can show what he can do for the better? Why do the others get rewards and I can't

because I don't hold an office? The issue is not new. Let us not go back as far as Adam and *Iblees* (Lucifer). Let's leave that for another time because that is a masterpiece in itself. The issue existed in the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} also. Here is one example.^D

The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} was sitting with some of his companions in the mosque. A lady named Asmaa Bint Yazeed Ansari (Asmaa daughter of Yazeed Ansari) showed up and asked permission to speak. This must have been a scene. A woman standing in front of the Holy Prophet^{saw} and other men wanting to say something. Remember this was 1400 years ago and women's lib was a thing of the future. She got everyone's attention. When she got permission, she gave a landmark rendering of injustice against women. Following is a summary of what she expressed:

O' Prophet of Allah, there is no justice. Men have it made. They go to the mosque for prayers five times a day and get reward from Allah while we are taking care of the kids, cleaning, cooking and doing the household chores and can't go. Then our men decide to go for Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and leave us behind. While they are getting their bounties and rewards from Allah, we get stuck with extra work. We end up doing the housework and the shopping and outside work that they would normally do. (It used to take about two to three months to do the Hajj. Transportation was real slow.) Then to top it all off, they go to the Jihad (holy war) when they are called upon to do so. This is the ultimate. They are going to fight in the cause of Allah and get the best rewards and we end up with double duty. (Expeditions used to be anywhere from six months to a couple of years). We have to tend to the fields also and do the repairs and other things that men are supposed to do. I think it is an injustice to us women. Why should men get all the rewards while we are stuck taking care

of their children and their houses?

The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} looked at his companions and asked them: “Have you ever known another lady who could speak so eloquently as this one?” The companions, I think still in awe, said they didn’t even know these issues existed. She has done an excellent job of presenting the case for women.

Then the Holy Prophet^{saw} turned toward Asmaa and addressed her. He said: “What I am about to say to you is not just for you but I want you to convey this to all women. If a woman is taking care of her husband’s kids and his house, she gets exactly the same reward as her husband whether he is going to the mosque, performing the Hajj or participating in Jihad”.

It is a wonderful declaration of the Holy Prophet^{saw}. If everyone would do what they are entrusted with, they get equal rewards. If a person in authority is doing his job and I am only doing what I am supposed to be doing, we both get the same reward. One has to prepare a speech and deliver it without perspiring and all I have to do is to listen. I think my job is a lot easier so let me do my job. Well, that was a good thought until I started to prepare my job description.

As an individual, I started to examine myself as to how good I am in fulfilling my duties. Do I really go to the mosque for all the *Juma* (Friday) prayers? Could I make it to the mosque for some other prayers if I really made an effort? Do I combine the prayers every day without exception? I know I have to do that in the weekdays because of my work; I pacify myself. What about on Sundays when I have nothing to do? Do I really say my *Zuhr* (at noon) and *Maghrib* (at sunset) prayer on time or do I still combine them as I do the rest of

the week. My argument about work starts to tumble down by now. Do I show up at the meetings on time or at the time the refreshments are ready? Do I pay attention to how I say my prayers or watch who performs it slow and who does it like he is on the run? Should I be the policeman of prayers?

My head starts to hurt when I start to think about my duties for inviting my friends to Islam and the training of my children and being nice to my wife. I can't even do the jobs I am supposed to do, let alone trying to change the world.

Asmaa cried injustice, but she was gracious enough lady to do her job. She got my respect.

Why would anyone desire for a public office? Either he is a fool or full of political ambitions. The third possibility is that the person is so arrogant that he truly believes that no one else can do as good a job as he can. (As I said earlier, we'll talk about Adam and *Iblees* some other time.) Any of the three reasons should disqualify a person from an office.

Many of these individuals fail to fulfill their responsibilities assigned or entrusted to them. Changing positions is one way to divert attention or display power. The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} would not assign anyone to a position if the person wished for it. There are clear indications in the Holy Qur'an that we should not desire for an office. The Holy Prophet said: You will be greedy after public office, but remember that it will be a source of humiliation on the Day of Judgment. Then He explained it in a different way: Do not ask for public office. If you are given it without asking you will be helped in discharging its responsibilities, but if you are given it on asking for it, you will be its captive.^E

It really is a sad commentary on the modern political

system and the concept of voting for yourself.

“No soul shall carry the burden of another soul.”⁹ That is the declaration of Allah in the Holy Qur’an. People, who are entrusted with responsibilities, let them do it. Let them carry their own burdens. They will have to answer for it. Nobody else has to cover their burden. We can get the same rewards for doing our job, as they will. So let me do my job. I’ve got a long way to go just doing that.

Something is rattling in my mind and I have to say it. I wonder if today’s women do their chores as Asmaa had laid them out. A Woman’s job is much easier now with microwaves and all. But, why should they be getting all the rewards for the work that we men do? The same pay for less work; it is not fair. Some may say it is injustice against men. I just wanted to get it out of my system. I can’t change the rules of reward. I have had enough time trying to say my *Zuhr* (at noon) prayer on time on Sundays.

I better stop now. The presidential debate is about to come on TV right about now. Let me get back to refining my plans to change the world.

Some things never change.





Miracles Galore

A man with a pale of water on his side was standing in front of a crowd. He announced to the crowd that he is a prophet of God. Someone yelled that he should show a miracle or a sign.

The man sort of expected a response like that so he was ready. He said that he had some rocks in his pocket. He would put them in the pale of water and they will all dissolve like powder. He proceeded to do that. In a few moments, the rocks dissolved and made the water murky.

There was a doubting Thomas in the crowd so he spoke up. He did not trust the rocks the man had used. So the doubting Thomas offered that he would provide the rocks and let's see if they get dissolved. The man replied: "It seems I have been sent at the appropriate time. You people are even worse than the opponents of Moses^{as} were. When Moses^{as} turned his staff into a serpent, they did not object. They didn't say to Moses^{as}, 'We'll give you a staff, see if you can change that into a serpent'."

I don't know how this whole thing about the miracles started and how far back it goes in the history. Miracles have been associated with religions and prophets of God. Noah^{as}'s flood, Abraham^{as}'s walking through the fire, Moses^{as}' turning the river into blood, Jesus^{as} walking on the water and the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}'s splitting the moon are a tiny part of the spectrum of miracles in religious history.

I am not going to get into the discussion of whether they happened or not the way people believe they did. Some take them literally and some make their own interpretations. Some have come up with a combination of both. Some try to prove the impossible through scientific basis of proof and some just take it as blind faith. I am certainly not qualified to have a discussion as complicated as on the subject of miracles. I am sure that the religious scholars will keep on discussing them as long as the concept of religion is around. I would like to discuss it in a different reference.

The Holy Qur'an has brought up an interesting argument in the chapter *Bani Israeel* in reference to the miracles. I will try to present it in a simple way. God said that people are demanding miracles from the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}. He is not going to show them the way you want to see them. He is a Messenger and a human being. Even if he would, the non-believers are not going to accept him. History tells us that people accepted our prophets because they were obedient people and not because of the miracles. The miracles did not do any good in the past then why should we entertain your demands?

Jesus^{as} walked on water. Let us go along with the story. Once the show was over, how many people converted to his faith? He still had only twelve disciples. Well, eleven, if you count Judas out.

I am amazed at this person Judas who got Jesus^{as} caught for 30 coins. Here is the man who is arranging for the crucial event of the salvation of millions of Christians and for just 30 coins. If it wasn't for Judas, there could be no salvation because Jesus^{as} would have escaped. Maybe, Judas did not realize how important an event he was about to set off.

It could be that the moles work for satisfaction and not for money.

Jesus^{as} walked on water, but people didn't accept him. He lost Judas in the process. Remember Jesus^{as} walked on water before he was put on the cross. Judas must have witnessed it or at least heard about it. I know if anyone walked on water in my town, we'll make sure the whole world knows about it; even if Fox News and CNN were not interested.

Moses^{as} turned his staff into a serpent and Pharaoh's heart did not melt, it was hardened. Moses^{as} changed the river into blood, and the Pharaoh ordered his armies to follow Moses^{as} and the Israelites.

Does it make any sense to go through the same kind of miracles, which produced no results? Either they did not happen the way people think they did or they just didn't work. Either way, it can be a futile exercise. God did not want to waste the time of Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} in entertaining the strange demands of his opponents. He wanted him to continue to reform the people around him.

Let us discuss now why the prophets need the miracles. Jesus^{as} was teaching people to be kind and loving. Don't fight back; someone smites you on one cheek, turn the other one. If someone asks for your shirt, give him your cloak also. How

does teaching like this offend others? Why would you need to walk on water or raise the dead and how would it support these teachings.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} was teaching people to worship God, help the poor, needy, orphans, travelers and the widows. Be kind to your parents and don't bury your daughters alive. What was so offensive about the teaching? Why would he need to show some strange phenomena to make people understand the obviously wonderful teachings?

Miracles or not, some people were not going to accept them. They were afraid of the change. They knew that teaching like that was destined to reform people and it was destined to succeed.

God did show the miracle of saving His chosen ones from their enemies at the appropriate time. Jesus^{as} was saved from the cross, Moses^{as} was saved crossing the water while Pharaoh was defeated and the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} was given victory over his enemies against tremendous odds.

These miracles did help the believers to further strengthen their faith in God. Jesus' disciples spread his message all over the world. The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}'s companions became the teachers of the world in a short time. The savages and beasts became the noblest people to spread knowledge, wisdom and spirituality all over the globe.

We see miracles every day, which can lead us to God if we believe. Every time a child is born, it is a miracle. A six-pound human being with all its faculties is developed from a sperm drop. Every time we breathe air in our lungs, think how it keeps us alive by triggering a chain reaction in all our organs.

That's a miracle we experience every few seconds. How the seeds are programmed to develop new trees and produce more seeds. That's a miracle. The consistent repetition in nature is a miracle.

God's creations, like a mosquito, are a miracle. It detects the warm blood vein while flying in the air and lands on it perfectly. It knows how to desensitize the skin before it sucks blood. We don't realize that when we squatter one of them, we destroy a complicated piece of machinery.

If we believe in God, the miracles are endless.

Maybe you relate to things on a bigger scale. I think the hurricane is a miracle. I don't mean the destruction it causes, the housetops flying and the news reporters getting wet. I am referring to its formation. How in the calm seas, the winds change and we have a beast coming at us and millions of people have to evacuate. Did you see the Perfect Storm? Did you see the size of the waves against which the fishing boat looked like a toy? Now, that was a miracle. If we tried to make a storm like that, we'll have to use about a hundred atomic bombs. Probably the collateral damage will kill us all.

There always will be people who don't believe. Let us suppose that the man with the pale of water was able to take the rocks from the crowd and dissolve them. I bet that they would question whether it was really water in that pale.

Doubting Toms will never be satisfied.





Red Light Shopping

At one of the exits on the Eisenhower expressway near downtown Chicago, I stopped at the red light. There were a few cars in front of me waiting for the light to turn green. Alongside the exit ramp, a man had set up a display of merchandise.

All along the fence, he had pictures in frames, candies, stuffed animals and some other attention grabbing items. It was a big display, at least twenty-five feet long. I started to mumble. Who would buy these things? How did this man figure that he could sell this stuff? He probably designed his own marketing plan. I am sure he doesn't know about time management, guessing at the time it takes him to set it up and repack at the end of the day.

I rejected the thought that it was his front to sell drugs. This was too much hard work for a drug-pusher. I continued mumbling. Where does he even buy this merchandise? He probably got it in a bulk purchase at a garage sale.

It was amazing how the man was trying to make a sale

walking from one car to the next. He was bundled up because it was cold and that did not improve his demeanor as a salesman. I do not know how many hours he spent there and how many days a week.

I could see other drivers in car next to me squirming in their seats praying to God that the light would change before he gets to their car. We do remember God at every desperate moment. Well, the light turned green and I was happy that he had not gotten to my car yet.

It was a close one. I have a strict policy not to open the windows of my car in that neighborhood. This is part of my Homeland Security plan.

By our behavior, every day of our lives, we condone certain behavior in others. I could not count how many times in my life I have given money to the beggars on the streets of Lahore, Cairo, Paris and even in Chicago downtown. I have given money to the people at red lights with cans in their hands when I had no clue why they were wearing colorful aprons. But, I would not give a dollar to the man on the exit ramp for a candy.

Here is a man who is making an effort to make a living. Instead of begging, he is selling something. As for the usefulness of the items, I can show you my garage full of things that I bought from big shopping centers and never used them. My clothes closet is another example, but that's because of my losing the race with the changing fashions.

I didn't have to buy a painting from him or a stuffed animal. I could have just given him a dollar for the effort. He was being honorable. At least he did not smear my windshield with his dirty squeegee after I had just paid eight dollars to

wash my car.

Our religion Islam has emphasized so much for giving charity that we feel good when we give to a beggar. The beggars know it too. I don't know how many millions of beggars are there in Muslim countries, but they are everywhere. Even when you visit the Great Pyramids in Egypt, walking around in the heat, you find beggars. There is nobody selling water bottles or Coke for the tourists, but they are there to beg from them. I wonder if I condone this behavior of the beggars.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} said that the upper hand is better than the lower hand.^F He also professed to his people not to beg, but to work and make a living off their sweat. Muslims seem to forget that, especially the professional beggars.

It was the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} who told one of his companions to sell the only clothes he had and buy an axe. Then he told him to cut the woods in the jungle and sell it in the market.^G

Beggars' count went down by one that day.

Not understanding the concept of having pride in working for living changes masses into beggars. We even got some Muslim Governments who have become beggars of the modern world.

We should look around ourselves and see which behavior we should condone. When we see a brother doing a good thing, we should give him a helping hand. If nothing else, give him good advice or appreciate his goodness. When you see someone displaying indecent behavior, don't just pass by. Make a point of it, otherwise your being quiet will condone

his behavior. Sometimes, what you don't say or do is more important than what you say or do.

Spending for the sake of God is not just to give to the beggars. The Holy Qur'an tells us to spend our money on our family, travelers, needy and the orphans. It also tells us to spend on people for *Taaleef-i-Quloob* (soothing or captivating the hearts) to empower them to do good. This is to help the people who do not beg but you know that they need it. Spend on them to empower them to be respectable so they don't have to beg.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} especially kept his eyes on families like that and made sure that they were helped. I think the man on the exit ramp qualified. I believe spending money on him would have been spending in the way of Allah. God knows I didn't need his merchandise, especially the candy.

The following verse of the Holy Qur'an is very straightforward:

“These alms are for the poor who are detained in the cause of Allah and are unable to move about in the land. The ignorant consider them to be free from want merely because they desist from begging. Thou shalt know them by their appearance; they do not beg of men with importunity. And whatever you spend of your wealth on such people of that Allah is fully-aware.”¹⁰

Sometimes, I wonder if the man on that ramp is still there. Maybe he changed his spot after having experience with prospective customers like me. Maybe he revised his marketing plans. I hope, actually I pray, that he did not conclude it was

easier and more profitable to be a beggar.

I hope I didn't help him make that decision.

I really did not have much use for the five dollars that I could have spent on shopping at the ramp for one of his paintings. I could have gotten blessings by shopping at that exit ramp. He provided me the opportunity and I missed it.

It was a real good deal for only five bucks. I rarely miss a bargain at the Mall.

I wish I had better understanding of spending in the way of Allah back then.



PRIDE

GREED

LUST

ENVY

SLOTH

WRATH

GLUTTONY

Sin, the “S” word

These days everyone is careful about using the word “sin”. The politicians talk about the moral issues such as homosexuality and the causes of abortion. They all refer to these issues as “against our tradition”, “against our values”, “against our religious beliefs”, thus always avoiding the “S” word.

I think it is a simple enough word; only three consonants and one vowel. Maybe it is because people have forgotten what this word means. We have got enough of it around so I don’t know why we would have a problem referring to it.

I think it has to do with our being super conscious about the words we use which have religious connotations. Otherwise, I fail to understand why a righteous person would object to the use of the “S” word. A sinner’s objection, now **that** I can understand.

When we park on the wrong side of the street or speed on the highways, we know there are consequences. It is because we are breaking the laws established by the government. It may be local, state or federal, but nonetheless, someone is

going to make us pay for it. We know it is wrong and we do it intentionally and then justify the reasons of our behavior. There are books compiled on what kind of excuses people have used when caught speeding. We also have the thought process covered as to how we are going to beat the ticket and which lawyer could do that. This, of course, is after trying to talk the officer into not issuing the ticket in the first place.

Sin is nothing more than the breaking of the laws established by God instead of the ones human beings drafted. It should be simple enough to understand. When we break the laws of the land, we commit a “crime”. Similarly when we intentionally break the laws of God, we commit a “Sin”.

Now you can inter-relate the words “criminal” and “sinner”. The only thing left now to discuss is what constitutes a sin in the eyes of God and how He is going to make us pay for it. His mercy doesn’t work when we challenge His laws blatantly and openly.

The laws of God are defined in various religions and the preachers make sure that the followers are reminded of them constantly. The fact is that without religion, there is no concept of morality. Speaking the truth, not stealing, respecting your parents and other values all started from the teachings of the religions.

Most of the laws of the land all stem from the principles that have roots in the prevalent religion of the land. We know how to make people obey the laws against theft or perjury but we call them “crime” and avoid the “S” word. The fact is that most of the time when we are breaking the law of the land, we are also breaking the law of God. The punishment for the latter cannot be ignored. Truthful people like Jesus^{as}, Moses^{as} and the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} all testified to it. They had no

problem using the “S” word and the court hearing associated with it.

God has declared that there will be a hearing on our violations of His laws. Some refer to it as the ‘day of judgment’, ‘the hour’, and ‘day of reckoning’ etc. but regardless of its name it is going to take place. Trying to talk ourselves out of it is what we don’t want to think about. So we would rather not talk about it.

It is tough when God is the witness and it is established that we were told about the laws through thousands of prophets who came warning us. Lying would not help because it is the All-Knowing God who is the Judge. This has to be the optimum courtroom; the lawyers are missing.

Come to think of it, without that kind of Day of Judgment, the concept of having laws seems meaningless.

Even a hundred years ago in America, people talked about sin. The politicians, the news reporters and the general public used the word openly. They were not ashamed to refer to something as a sin if it was against the laws of God as described in their faith. Now we have a situation that even if anyone refers to it in a statement, the news reporters present it as if it were a statement of a “fanatic” and they better not give it enough coverage; Sort of when they get a statement from a terrorist. They know the public should know about it, but not give it so much coverage that it becomes noteworthy.

One of the reasons for avoiding the word “sin” has to do with how the behavior of society has changed. A few decades ago, there was no open dating in this country. Chaperones were assigned for courtship of young people before they decided to get married. A person committing sin was openly disliked in

the society. The church had a big part in it to make sure that the decent people were not confused with the violators of the laws of God.

Things have changed. In the offices and factories, on Monday morning, you hear people discussing what they did over the weekend and without using the “S” word, how many times they violated the laws of God. They call it the truth because why should they hide it even if they have done something wrong. Is it not better to tell the truth than to lie about it? Well, I call it the “Boldness of Sin”.

When people start talking about sinful activities openly, it starts to sound as normal behavior and then they don’t want to call it “sin” anymore. The concept of hiding the sins of others and not spreading the news relates to the same concept. I purposely did not use the religious terminology “backbiting” because I will have to start explaining the use of this word. It is not a good idea to extend this discussion. You see, I have attention-span issues.

Whether we use the “S” word or not we are still accountable. God still sends the curse upon the liars. The adulterers are still going to be called upon for their punishment. The backbiting and other indecent behavior are still going to be asked about. The court date is definite.

Sometimes we think of time in our terms of measurement, but it may be sooner than we think. It seems like it was yesterday; I was going to school and demanding things from my parents. Everything got turned around somewhere down the line, but a lot of time has passed the way we measure it.

The best thing is to find out what we should avoid

because it is against the laws of God, so we can be on guard. Christians can watch the Ten Commandments and the Muslims can study the commandments in the Holy Qur'an, which are about seven hundred.

Allah has given us an easy way. Don't be afraid of the burden of learning all the commandments. We have been given a simple formula until we can get to have knowledge. The Holy Qur'an says, "Follow the path that leads towards Me (God)".¹¹ Very simply it means that when it is time for prayer and your friend is calling you to play around, gossip or watch TV, take the path that will get you closer to God. It certainly is not the one watching TV on which it is politically incorrect to use the "S" word.

Sin is something we should talk about. Avoiding sin is the first step in our journey to the heights of spirituality that we can achieve. It is like we have to clean up before we can put the dry-cleaned clothes on and spray the cologne.

It would be a shame if we don't try to utilize the capability God bestowed in our souls.

I think it would be a sin.





Alkane

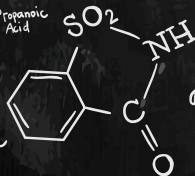
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Methanol
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Propanoic
Acid

liquid
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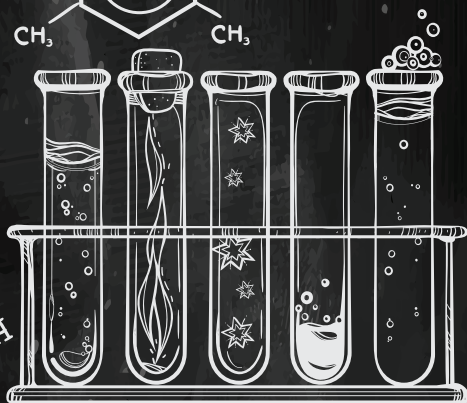
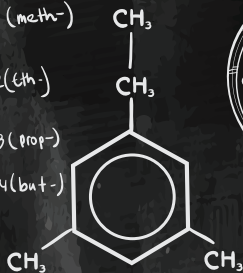
Number of
Carbons

1 (meth-)

2 (eth-)

3 (prop-)

4 (but-)



Science of Knowledge

It was in 1969 that man marched on the moon. Now we are trying to find ways to land on Mars. Science has really come a long way. Knowledge is on the increase. In the process, what we have discovered is that the more knowledge we gain we realize the lack thereof. Sorry for the “thereof”. I was trying to impress you with my knowledge of legal terms.

We still have not figured out how old the planet earth is. James Michener, in his book *Centennial*, talked about it. He put together a chart showing what the estimate of the life of earth was calculated to be at different times in history. I will not reproduce the whole chart. To give you an idea, in 1642, it was estimated that the earth started on September 17, 3928 BC. This was the estimate by John Lightfoot, professor of Greek. In 1869, Thomas Huxley's estimate was 100,000,000 years. In 1917, Joseph Bernell figured it to be 1,600,000 years. Tilton and Steiger, in 1960, calculated it to be between 4,750,000,000 years plus and minus 50,000,000 years. Tilton and Steiger did their analytic work on the Canadian Shields using lead isotopes.

As Mr. Michener suggested in his book, we should not try to guess the age until more studies are in. Pretty soon the age of the earth could be estimated at 6 billion years or longer as we move in the future. The fact is that the more knowledge we acquire, we find out that there is more to figure out.

In our quest to probe the earth, with all the knowledge and resources, we haven't gone far. I think the diameter of the earth is about 12,500 miles. The deepest hole we have been able to dig is in the thousands of feet. So we have only scratched the surface. Let me put it in a way that we can relate to the size proportions. Let us say that the earth is an apple. With a needle, you probe into the apple. So far we have not gone beyond its peel. We are searching around in the skin and who knows if we will ever get to the good part.

This same proportion holds true when you compare going to Mars with the size of the universe as we have estimated its size at this time.

The earth is a mass. When you probe it, it lets you experiment with it. You can drill it, blow it up, carve it, treat it or mistreat it in any way you want. It allows you to explore it, feel it, test it and it does not resist. In spite of this fact, our knowledge is limited. We can be standing in a pond and wouldn't know if five feet away from us is a snake, a turtle or a jellyfish waiting for us to step on it.

So far I have talked about the physical world. When it comes to the knowledge about human beings, it is a different story altogether.

Humans resist, deceive, dodge and are good at acting. They even attend acting schools so they can be good at it.

The wives have a problem getting answers to simple questions. Such as: Do I look fat? Which dress do you think looks better on me? Husbands have devised facial expressions to mingle with their words. Trying to get information from the spouse in the divorce court takes a whole new dimension. When we want to probe human beings, our job is tough and in some cases impossible.

We consider someone guilty and put him in jail. In some cases even put them on death row. Then we find out that the person was innocent. It is not always the accused that is acting. Sometimes, it is the police and even the judges. The State of Illinois cancelled all death penalties because the situation became so apparent. So how do we find the truth from human beings?

A lot of times our issues in our society stem from envy, suspicion and greed. We have been told in the Holy Qur'an not to get involved in suspicion of others' faults. We fool ourselves as self-righteous by pointing out other's shortcomings. The Holy Qur'an even says that some suspicion becomes a sin. Here, some translate the word "sin" as something that does much harm.

Ibn-i-Masood^{ra} (a companion of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}) has related that we have been forbidden (by the Holy Prophet^{saw}) to search for faults. We can take note of that which is obvious and overt.^H The same way we have been commanded not to spy on others.

There is also a principle established by Islam, which is unique. If a person accuses another of a wrongful act and it is proved to be false, the accuser would get the punishment of that act. If a person accuses another of adultery and it proves

to be false, the accuser gets the punishment prescribed for adultery. The proof of the accusation has to be in accordance with the strict laws in reference to witnesses.

Once it is established a witness lied, his or her testimony is never accepted in the court in the future for anything. The policemen in those murder cases would have been careful if they knew they could be charged for false accusations.

While I am at it, let me give you my take on the Clinton-Monica fiasco. First of all, there is no justification for spending millions of dollars for spying in gathering evidence against any person for adultery.

In the New Testament, there is only one case in which a woman was tried for adultery. She was going to be stoned. One thing to note is that the man was not charged. Obviously, if she committed adultery there had to be a man involved. She didn't do it by herself. We have other names for that kind of activity. Jesus^{as} asked the crowd why they were going to stone her. This is the story where Jesus^{as} said: "Let the man who hath not sinned cast the first stone". What Jesus^{as} actually inferred was that you are a nation of adulterers. How can you take one woman and stone her. If she needs to be stoned then all of you line up with her.

In the western society, where it is just about required, if not a tradition, to date and have sex before getting married, everyone is a fornicator. I am not just talking about the couples that decide to live together before getting married. So how can you point fingers at one person for sexual misbehavior?

It is much more important to keep the innocent protected. It is not that essential to punish the guilty. You will find in the Islamic law, such stringent standards for proving

an accusation. You need four eyewitnesses to prove fornication or adultery. If you accuse and you cannot come up with the witnesses, you can be liable for the punishment that the accused would have received.

The guilty are eventually going to be punished by the Almighty. If O.J. Simpson did it, God will definitely deal with him in the next world. So have faith and try to reform people instead of finding ways to get them the punishment in this world. There is no problem with knowledge and truth with God because He is the All-Knowing. Meanwhile, we have to deal with our shortcomings of knowledge in this world.

So let's do the best we can. Allah says that if you forgive in order to reform the person, your reward is with Him. Let us not try to act as if we mastered the knowledge and truth.

I am not sure what the age of this planet is. I know that it is about fifteen minutes more than when you started reading this article. Frankly, I am not sure about that either.

You could have read it slower or faster just to throw my estimate out the window.





Magic of Change

Mom: I want you to go and clean up your room.

Son: Mom, I am watching football. I'll do it later.

Mom: You always say that but never do. Do it now.

Son: (towards TV) Ditka was over-rated, moron. What did he do with the New Orleans Saints? Who made you a commentator?

Mom: What did you say?

Son: I'll do it later Mom; this is the football season.

Mom: Last time, I ended up cleaning it. I am not doing it this time.

Son: (Loud Voice) Oh, that must have hurt. He is done for the season.

Mom: What was that?

Son: It's the football season, Mom leave me alone.

Most families are familiar with this scene. It does not happen in all the families. It's because some fans don't take the risk of watching the game at home. They would rather go to a sports bar, preferably without the mom.

It is absolutely amazing how the football season emotionally charges the fans. The game is only one hour. The rest of the three hours you see overly grown men spitting, scratching and touching each other's behinds. In between, the TV cameras show us with what speed various coaches can chew gum.

In the Pre-game show, the ex-ballplayers tell us how the game is going to turn out and the Monday morning coaches explain why it didn't. It's just a game.

Moms keep on working on their sons. Changing them is not something they count on. Fathers are smart enough to keep quiet in these situations. They know precisely when to play dumb and deaf. Over time, they have mastered to play one or the other and a combination thereof. Trying to change them is something the moms gave up a long time ago.

Changing people's attitude, habits, demeanor, goals and objectives has never been easy. You really need a prophet to do it. I mean it is only the real prophets who have been able to transform the people. They have been amazingly successful at it.

It was the magic of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} that transformed people into different human beings altogether.

Bilal was being dragged on the hot rocky streets of Mecca. I have been to Mecca. Those rocky streets are a pain just to walk on them. All he had to do was keep quiet and they would let him go. But he could not stop saying, "Allah is one". What made him continue to bear the pain, the heat and the beating? That was the miracle of transformation by the Holy Prophet^{saw}.

Abu Talha Ansari^{ra} was one of the affluent Muslims of Medina. He had his hand in front of the Holy Prophet^{saw} on the day of the Battle of Uhud. The arrows kept on coming and he kept on taking them on his hand so they wouldn't hit the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}. The hand became paralyzed as a result. What was going through his mind when the next arrow hit and it hurt even more than the one before it? It was his faith and love for a man who had transformed him into a heavenly person. There was no way he was going to let him be in harm's way.

The same people who were cruel enough to bury their daughters alive were the ones who would start crying at the recitation of the Holy Qur'an. Teenagers would stand on their toes so they could look taller than they really were so they could be accepted to join in the battle of *Badr* for the sake of Allah.

These were all miracles of the transformation of people that are performed by the prophets only. Without coercion, people want to offer sacrifices of their wealth, honor and even life. All of that is done for the reward expected from their Lord.

Now you know the meaning of the verses that say that non-believers claim that the Prophet is nothing more than a magician. They could not believe the results of the magic of change.

Trying to change a boy to take a few minutes from

the ballgame is a huge task. Try changing the people to lay down their lives and sacrifice everything they've got. That takes a miracle. The fact is that this miracle of transformation is the deciding factor for the truth and recognition of a prophet of God. God knows nobody else could do that.

A word of advice for the moms: Don't interrupt the kids when they are watching football. Don't give them the excuse to go to the sports bar. Football season is like the hay-fever season. It is not a real sickness. It just feels like one. There is no cure for it so you just have to weather it out. You can talk during the commercials unless there is another game on another channel.

God bless the remote control.

And don't forget, the pre-game show is part of the game.





O ye people! fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and created therefrom its mate, and from them twain spread many men and women; and fear Allah, in Whose name you appeal to one another, and fear Him particularly respecting ties of relationship. Verily, Allah watches over you.

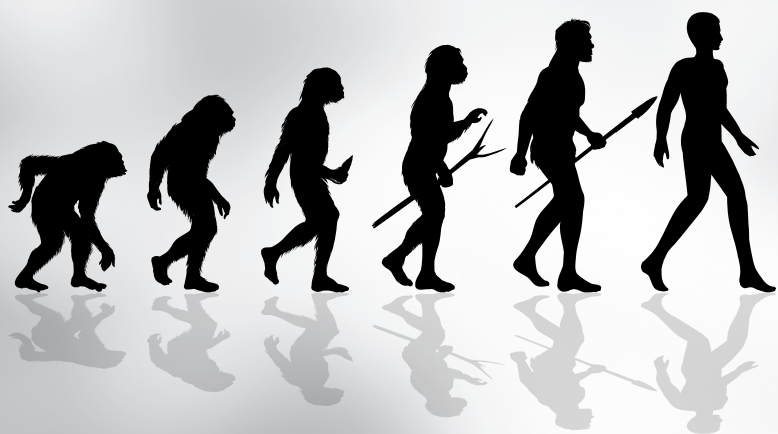
CH4 R1

O ye who believe! fear Allah, and say the right word. He will bless your works for you and forgive you your sins. And whoso obeys Allah and His Messenger, shall surely attain a mighty success.

CH33 R9

O ye who believe! fear Allah; and let every soul look to what it sends forth for the morrow. And fear Allah; verily Allah is Well-Aware of what you do.

CH59 R3



Apes and Angels

Where did we come from?

Don't get excited, I am not going to talk about the stork or the birds and the bees. Fathers used to be embarrassed when they had to have a conversation with their sons about the birds and the bees. Times have changed. They get embarrassed now for a different reason. These days when a father tells his son that it is time they talked about the birds and the bees, the son answers, "Sure Dad, what do you want to know?"

Human beings have always been curious about their origin. Darwin came up with the theory that we came from apes. I have known some people who could be classified as one generation away from the apes. However, that is no reason to classify the whole human race as monkeys or gorillas.

Our quest to find our origin and the process involved in getting us where we are has benefited many of us. If it weren't for this curiosity, the archaeology departments at colleges and universities would not have existed. The professional would be out of a job that gets paid by digging in the dirt with tiny

toy shovels and the \$1.99 paintbrush. Isn't it amazing what our government pays for under the endowment funds for educational purposes? I know we pay for all of that through our taxes, but I remind everyone, what Will Rogers said: "Just be glad that you are not getting all the government you are paying for."

For most people, a discussion about our origin takes them to Adam^{as}, Eve and *Iblees* (Lucifer of the Bible). That's a problem right there. The confusion comes in because we try to mix our origin with the appointment of Adam^{as} as the spiritual representative of God on earth.

Let us just keep in focus here how the Holy Qur'an relates the story:

God created Adam^{as} as the *Khalifah*, God taught him the names. The angels objected that it would create bloodshed. Allah said that He knows and that they do not. God told Adam^{as} to say the names to see if he could do it. The Angels were surprised and admitted that they had limited knowledge. The Angels prostrated, except *Iblees*, because he was arrogant.¹²

Our origin as human species on this earth and what is being described about Adam^{as} are totally two different things from time standpoint as well as the subject matter. Our problem in this discussion stems from the fact that we try to bring the two in one.

We really don't know how far ago, the human species developed. It could be millions of years or even billions. It is a long time no matter which guess you go along with. Adam^{as} was on the earth about six thousand years ago. So there is a lot of time difference right there. Millions of years or billions minus six thousand years equal a whole lot of time difference.

I have heard the following comments at more than one gathering in reference to the quotation of the Holy Qur'an I mentioned above. The following points get raised:

1. The Angels' reading was that man would shed blood.
2. Allah overruled the Angels.
3. It seems from what we see today that the angels were right and God was wrong (God forbid).
4. *Iblees* was an angel.
5. Adam^{as} committed a sin (God forbid) because he went along with Eve.

Let me get the process of our evolution out of the way first. According to the Holy Qur'an, an evolution did take place. We started out in the water, with no gender. Then the couples were made out of one cell or specie. Then further developments took place and we were shaped to live openly on planet earth. The evolution could have taken millions of years and scientists will continue to figure out how long ago it was. No question in anyone's mind that it was more than 6,000 years ago.

Now let us discuss the story of Adam^{as}. The verses in the Holy Qur'an do not relate to the creation of Adam^{as}. It says that Allah decided to make him the representative (caliph). So the discussion of the Angels and everything else mentioned is in that context. Let us see how it can be analyzed in view of this particular context:

1. Adam^{as} was taught by God. He proved in front of the angels that he could relate to others what he was

taught. Signs were there of him being a good teacher.

2. The Angels were saying that by appointing Adam^{as} as God's Caliph, there will be opposition and that could result in bloodshed. The angels were right because *Iblees* (Lucifer) didn't waste any time in voicing the opposition.

3. Allah's response was that He knows what it will take for humans to elevate themselves. His plan of teaching through revelation and prophets like Adam^{as} is the only way for them to succeed. The fact is that the spiritual, moral and secular progress of human beings has taken place at a much faster pace with the advent of the prophets than at any other-time in history.

4. *Iblees* was not an angel. Angels by definition cannot disobey God. He was the opposing force against God's decision of selecting Adam^{as} as His caliph.

5. There are angels to obey God and there are people like *Iblees* who disobey because of their arrogance.

The arrogance of *Iblees* stemmed from the fact that he felt, if anyone, it should have been him to have the position given to Adam^{as}. He is made of fire. He makes things happen, full of energy. Adam^{as} is made of clay. You can mold him, reshape him and he is not strong enough to stand against the opposing forces. (According to *Iblees*)

This story has been repeated in history many times. Change the name Adam^{as} to Moses^{as} and *Iblees* to Pharaoh, same story different names. Pharaoh was the arrogant one who wanted to be the image of God on earth. There was no way he was going to accept a person like Moses^{as}. So is true in the times of all the prophets (Allah's caliphs.)

It is really not that important how many billions of years ago we started out. Let the scientists and archeologists continue to work on that. Everybody's got to make a living.

What is important is to understand what our part is in the story of Adam^{as}. Are we like the angels who bow down to the person whom Allah sends as His messenger and representative? Or are we the followers of *Iblees* to reject him because of our arrogance? It is a pattern in the Holy Qur'an, whenever it talks about the prophets of God, it repeats the lines: "Remember the time, We sent Adam^{as}."13,14

As a side point, Eve got in that trouble because she was good natured, trusting and kind. Nature of woman is such, soft hearted and trusting, which is crucial for raising her children. The Holy Qur'an says it was an oversight on Adam^{as}'s part, not a sin.

You want to know about the making of Eve from the rib theory. It is just a metaphoric expression. Just like the rib, woman protects a man's heart and vital organs essential for his life. She is like a separate structure as the ribs seem to be but part of man's life. She is also flexible like the ribs, but if you pressure it too much, it can break. Man must care for her sensitivities.

Don't waste your time whether we came from apes or not. Just make sure you don't act like one when a God's Caliph delivers His message.





Missing the Window

I was never a parade freak. I did go to a few Columbus Day parades when I could stand in the cold without catching one. It wasn't because I was a Columbus fan; although he should be honored for being the "New Dealer" of them all. He started out not knowing where he was headed and got back not knowing where he had been. The most wonderful part was that he did it all with someone else's money. I just thought the Columbus Day parade was better than most of them.

Going to seeing a parade is wonderful. You see all the people cheering and clapping. I am sure the loudest of them are the paper and balloon business owners.

The big drawback to see a parade is that you have to get there on time. Once you miss a part of it, you have to wait a whole year to see it. We get many windows of opportunities in our life. Once we miss them, like the parade, we wait for a long time to get them again. Sometimes we never get them back. No different than when you get too old to stand in the cold for six hours to see youngsters dancing on the deck of a paper ship.

In Medina, a man named Tha'labah used to come from a nearby valley to visit the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}. I'll tell you the story of him missing the window of opportunity.¹

Everyday, he would walk and get to Medina about *Zuhr* (noon) time. He would say his *Zuhr* prayer and had conversations with the Holy Prophet^{saw} and others. He would go back to his valley after *Asr* (afternoon) prayer. He asked the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} one day to pray for him that he would become a rich man. The Holy Prophet^{saw} said to him, "Tha'labah, why do you want to become rich? You know that it is much easier to fulfill your obligation when you are poor as compared to when you are rich." He kept on insisting that the Holy Prophet pray for him to get rich.

The Holy Prophet^{saw} took another approach with him. He said, "Why don't you follow my example? I live a very simple life. You know, if I were to ask God to make the hills of Medina turn into gold and silver, he would do it for me. But, I don't ask for that." Tha'labah still was not convinced. He kept on repeating his request.

The Holy Prophet^{saw} told him he would get in trouble if he were to become rich because he might not be able to fulfill his obligations to Allah. Tha'labah said, "O Prophet of Allah, I swear in the name of Allah when I become rich, I will fulfill all my obligations to Allah and His prophet." Finally the Holy Prophet gave up and told him that he would pray for him.

In the normal course of business, Tha'labah bought a few goats. These particular goats started multiplying like the gnats in the rainy season. In a very short time, his valley was filled with goats, wall to wall. Tha'labah was a rich man.

Managing a business always takes time. Even the goat

business back then was a time consuming venture. You needed to hire people to milk them, deliver the milk to surrounding areas, collect the money, clean the stalls and keep the boss happy. You need to do the payroll for these employees and keep controls on all phases of the business.

I didn't even mention the subsidiary that had to handle the goats to be sold to the butchers. That's another bloody business to be controlled and monitored.

Tha'labah was a rich man now, but also a busy one. He started skipping the *Zuhr* (noon) prayers. After a while, he could only come to *Juma* (Friday) prayers at the Prophet's Mosque. The pressures of business got to Tha'labah and he started to say *Juma* prayers in his valley as well. Parts of the Holy Prophet's fears were already showing their faces.

The Holy Prophet would occasionally ask about him from others. They would tell him that he was too busy with his business now. The Holy Prophet would show his disappointment that Tha'labah had gotten himself in trouble. He did not have the blessings of saying prayers with the Holy Prophet. He exchanged it for the money he had wished for.

One year, the Holy Prophet sent two people as collectors to neighboring towns with written instructions. Fixed rates were listed for *Zakat* that was required of a Muslim and it was an option to give other things in charity as they pleased. The Holy Prophet instructed them to especially go to Tha'labah and another person from the *Bani Sulaim* tribe because Allah had blessed both of them with wealth.

The collectors stopped at Tha'labah's valley because it was the closest to Medina and told him about the instructions from the Holy Prophet. He looked at the *Zakat* rates and

remarked that it looked like some kind of tax system. He said to them, “Why don’t you go to other villages. On the way back, you can stop here. I would have made up my mind by then.”

The collectors visited other villages and collected contributions. They visited the person of *Bani Sulaim* tribe and gave him the message. He not only gave according to the rates but also selected the best of camels and sheep and gave them as charity. He was so grateful to Allah. Even the collectors were feeling embarrassed for accepting the best of his cattle. On the way back, they stopped at Tha’labah’s valley.

Tha’labah had made up his mind. He said he could not give anything this year, but that they should check with him the next year. The collectors came back and related everything to the Holy Prophet. He, once again, felt sorry for Tha’labah and the trouble he had gotten himself into.

Every week at each *Juma* service, it was the practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} to recite the newly revealed verses of the Holy Qur’an. At one *Juma*, the verses he announced are part of the *Surah Taubah*: “And among them are those who made a covenant with Allah, saying, ‘If He give us of His bounty, we would most surely give alms and be of the virtuous.’ But when He gave them of His bounty, they became niggardly of it, and they turned away in aversion.”¹⁵

Tha’labah, of course, was not there but one of his relatives was. He realized that these verses fit him exactly. So after the *Juma*, he went to see Tha’labah.

This relative told Tha’labah that now the situation had gone beyond limits. Even the verses of the Holy Qur’an were being revealed about him. Tha’labah knew he screwed up. So he took a few camels, goats and other goods and came to Medina

to see the Holy Prophet. He said that he felt ashamed and he would like to give charity and *Zakat*.

He got the bombshell of his life. The Holy Prophet said, "Allah has commanded me not to accept any charity from you." Tha'labah insisted and begged, but there was no way that the Holy Prophet was going to reject Allah's instructions. Tha'labah left to go back to his valley in despair.

The window of opportunity had been lost. We get opportunities like that in our lives too. We are told to participate in a mosque project. If we don't, the parade is gone and we don't know when we will see the next one. The worst thing is that a point may come when Allah rejects anything we offer in His cause.

The Holy Prophet is not physically among us to inform us of that but we know from the above story, how it can happen. We have to watch the windows of opportunity. We have to step up to the plate at the right time.

In case you are wondering, Tha'labah tried to offer charity to Hazrat Abubakr (First caliph of Islam) when he became caliph, then to Hazrat Umar (second caliph) and Hazrat Usman (third caliph). Their answer was the same. "If the Holy prophet didn't accept, who are we to do it?" Hazrat Usman even refused to accept Zakat from him. He died in Hazrat Usman's time.

I don't care if you like the Columbus Day or the Rose Bowl parade. Just make sure you show up on time.

Yes, you can watch the parade on TV. But no matter what you say, it is not the real McCoy.



The Christmas Blues

I have spent over forty six Christmas seasons in Chicago. The city puts in a lot of effort in decorating the trees and downtown streets. The Marshall Fields store was a tourist spot in the Christmas season in the 60's.

The old timers think that downtown used to be prettier and much more fun in the old days. They think everything was better in the old days. Maybe it is in their eyesight that the lights just don't appear the way they used to. Maybe it is their memory. A lot of things happen with old age.

Christmas is beautiful. To tell you the truth, even I have prayed some years that we get the white Christmas. All my Christian friends wanted one. I think the red and green combination of Christmas dresses look much better with the white snowy background. I can say this without knowing anything about the fashions. My fashion know-how is never going to improve because my wife won't let me go shopping even for my own pajamas.

I could not bear the desperation on faces of my friends.

After all, they were not asking for a miracle like snow in the Sahara desert. It snows in Chicago every year without fail. All they were asking God was to move up the schedule a little. For the happy faces of 3 million people in Chicago, I figured, so what if we non-Christians suffer a little. After all, we get two days off work and we don't even have to go to church.

My suffering is not limited to shoveling the snow earlier in the season. I also feel sorry for so many people to believe in the story related to the Christmas season. Maybe they just want to believe it. Fantasy is always more fun and more beautiful than reality.

The movie industry makes billions on that concept.

I mean, to believe that Jesus^{as} was born in December is essentially to make sure Christmas comes in the snow season. Let us examine it. In the high cold hills of Bethlehem in Palestine, there were shepherds grazing their sheep. Mind you, in the winter the grass does not grow in those hills. The shepherds like to stay inside and so do the sheep. Then the three wise men show up. Shortly later, a star comes down on top of the barn where Jesus^{as} is born. For a people who have scientific, geographic and atmospheric knowledge, it is a testament of their blind faith.

How else could you tell a story like that with a straight face? After this scene, the story kind of disappears. All you hear is Hallelujah, Hallelujah, (peace on earth, peace on earth) and the Christmas music starts. I don't want to go into the peace marching of Christians at this time. Starting from the Crusades, the Spanish inquisition, Vietnam and now Iraq, the peace march is still on. Just the mention of this long historical peace march is enough to ruin the Christmas spirit.

My suffering continues with the concept of Santa Claus. Being raised in a Muslim country, I knew nothing about Santa Claus. As a matter of fact, I don't think he exists in the Southern Hemisphere or the hot climate countries. I mean to wear what he does and run down the house chimneys in areas around the equator would be a serious undertaking.

I looked up "Santa Clause" in the encyclopedia to satisfy my curiosity. I couldn't believe what I found out. His origin is Saint Nicholas from Izmir, Turkey. The details of his travels and the North Pole house continued to be made up as children kept on asking questions about who he was. You've got to look up the details in the encyclopedia. I apologize; it was before we had the Internet.

You have to look it up in the Internet. I think you type in the word Santa Claus and you get options to learn about his history. Even the old timers know how to find information faster these days.

The fact is that the 25th of December falls in the time when the sun worshipper pagans used to celebrate the returning of the sun. The sun starts its movement towards the north in that week. The celebration is called Saturnalia. So at some time, the Christians figured they would join in on the dancing, music, food and fun and do it in the name of Jesus^{as}. I found that out in the encyclopedia as well but this was under the word "Christmas".

Many Christians have Christmas blues also. The number of gifts they have to give to family members and friends is enough to turn anyone blue and this is after they have agreed to keep gifts to a \$25 minimum. They can't escape it.

The Holy Qur'an has referred to it as the chains around

their necks and ankles. People strap themselves with this sort of custom and find no way out. Some of my friends even say that they hate Christmas for this reason alone.

The Jehovah's Witnesses hate Christmas too but they have different reasons altogether. This is not a joke. Don't ever say "Merry Christmas" to a Jehovah's Witness unless you want to lose him as a friend. We don't need to take sides. Just be careful so we don't get caught in the middle.

While I was at the Chicago public library looking up these words, I decided to look under the word "Jesus" also. That opened up a whole new set of shockers for me. Encyclopedia Britannica said that there was no authentic history about Jesus^{as}. So I looked up other encyclopedias like Standard, Americana and Collier's. They had the same opinion. Now I knew why the Christians were sticking to their story. How can anyone challenge their story, the real stuff is missing. Logic, of course, is something they don't want to mix with their faith. It could take away their Christmas holidays.

I think their belief in Jesus^{as} being the Son of God is due to the same reason. The story just kept on getting bigger with time and before you know it, resemblance of reality disappeared. Making equals to God is sin. The first commandment should be sufficient to clarify that. "Thou shall have no other gods before Me."

To hate a sin is a virtue but we must not hate the sinner. This is truly a great principle and we should understand it.

When your mother saw you as a child coming home full of mud and filth, she did not hate you. She hated the mud and the filth but not you. She just wanted to clean you up. We should hate the sin of a human being, but not the ones

committing the sin. We need to help them clean themselves of that sin.

So let us not ruin Christmas by hating the Christians. We should share their happiness with them. We don't have to celebrate with them by drinking with them and going to their churches. Giving them a gift at their time of happiness and praying for them is not something we should be hesitant about. We should pray for their health, prosperity, well-being and especially for freedom from their bondage of sin.

We can give them the real thing by introducing them to the real God. But, how are we going to deliver it if we can't even get close to them. Christmas season will be over in a few weeks but our relationships could last for the rest of the year. I think it's worth the \$25 gift certificate. I am sure at some appropriate time you will receive something back.

I have told all my Christian friends I am open to receiving gifts at Christmas. I quote them the famous words of the Salvation Army bell ringers:

It is better to give, than to receive.





So far so Good

America is the greatest power on earth. I hear the President say that in his speeches. Other politicians make similar statements to convince us of this fact. We are also told that we are the greatest people on earth and no power on earth is going to be able to bring us down.

In American politics, these statements have always been common. There is a change, however. The religious right has joined openly in these statements. In the past, they did it low key, maybe concerned with the separation of state and church. The religious leaders are giving statements that Christian faith is the only one to be followed.

They also have made startling statements like Muhammad^{saw} was a terrorist (God forbid). Whether it is Robertson or Falwell, the message is the same. Christians are the only ones who will triumph. President Bush inter-mingled the religious message in his statement of us being the greatest power.

Listening to all that, while cruising through the TV

channels, I was reminded of the parable stated in the Holy Qur'an. In chapter named *Al-Kahf*, Allah has given a story of a conversation between two people. It is supposed to be between a Christian and a Muslim. This is also considered to be taking place in the latter days.

The parable says that this man had a great garden with fruit trees on both sides and in between he grew corn. There were also streams flowing. Everything grew in abundance. He was so proud of it. He said to his friend, arrogantly and boastfully, that he was richer than his friend was, had strong respect of people and that his garden will never perish. He also said that he did not think that the Day of Judgment would ever come. Even if it did, he will have an even better place of resort. His friend said to him that you do not believe in one God? As far he is concerned, he believes in Allah and he will not associate anyone with Him. You never know Allah could give him something better than that garden. Maybe this garden will have a thunderbolt sent on it and it will become a slippery ground.¹⁶

Doesn't it sound spooky how today's statements from the American religious and political leaders match with that of the man in the parable. Isn't that the same arrogant statement that we are the strong power and the Christians would have a better place in heaven as well?

I haven't told you the scary part yet. The next verse says:

“And his fruit was actually destroyed, and he began to wring his hands for what he had spent on it, and it had fallen down on its trellises. And he said, ‘Would that I had not associated anyone with my Lord’. And he had no party

to help him against Allah, nor was he able to defend himself.”¹⁷

Our statements about power or certain conditions are limited to the scope of time frame we are living in. A man, falling from the top of the Sears Tower, passed by the 50th floor. A man stuck his head out and asked him, “how’s it going?” He answered, “So far so good!” Now you know what I mean by the time frame in which a person is making statements.

We base a lot of statements on statistical analysis. I am sure you have also heard that famous saying about statistics. ‘There is nothing so misleading in this world as statistics, and we have figures to prove it.’ It makes a big difference how we use the information. I can tell you a joke to explain that.

There was a loud sound outside the airplane. The pilot got on the intercom and said, “One of our engines failed. There is nothing to worry about. We have two other engines. I would just like to tell you that it will take 6 hours instead of the 4 hours we would have taken to get to New York.”

There was another bang outside. The pilot got on the intercom again and announced: “Our second engine failed. There is nothing to worry about. The third engine is capable of running this plane. However, it will take us 8 hours to get to New York.”

A passenger looked at the fellow sitting next to him and said, “This is ridiculous. If the third engine fails, I bet we will be up here all night.”

The parable is really alarming us about the arrogance in the latter days of great powers who would be Christians. It also tells us that the destruction will come as a result of their

arrogance and the making of associates to God. This arrogance is not limited to the governments. Arrogance is also rampant in individuals also.

A person is arrogant if he believes that he is more learned, wiser or more proficient than his brother. A person is arrogant if he looks down on a brother because of his wealth, status or dignity. A person is arrogant if he makes fun of his brother and proclaims his physical defects. A person is arrogant who does not pray to God and does not render full obedience to the prophet of God he believes in. A person is even arrogant who, out of pride, corrects the pronunciation of a word spoken by his brother.

In my first Business Administration class, we were told to write a one-page essay on what makes America great. The professor told us there were only three students who had the answer correct. I happened to be one of them. The "correct" answer was "its economic and political system".

It was a paper that was not going to be graded so I spoke up. I said that I wrote that answer because I thought that's what the professor would want to see. However, I have a question. America had the same economic and political system but for the first 150 years it did not make it great. All we had was cowboys roaming around and hanging people for stealing horses. Why is it that it became great only in the last fifty years?

You can imagine how the conversation became dubious and we had to get back to our textbooks. Professors know how to dodge and avoid the questions they have no answers for.

The fact is that Holy Qur'an is clear that Allah gives wealth to judge the people how they behave. It is a trial. It is up to the individuals and nations to prove whether they were

worthy of it or not and for how long.

If you ask me the question if I think America is the greatest power on earth, my answer would be “yes”. If I was living in the year 1250BC in Egypt and someone asked me if the power of Ramses II was the greatest in the world, my answer would have been “yes”. If I was in Rome in the year 450AD and someone asked me if the Roman Empire was the greatest in the world, my answer would have been “yes”.

I guess, like most people, I am a trusting soul, master of the apparent.

I know I would have been proven wrong in due course of time. I don't know how long it will take to prove me wrong this time around. I can speak about the year 2009AD and give you an answer. About the future, don't look at me. What do I know? I just told you I would have been wrong every time. I wonder if our leaders think about that!





Nature Rules!

One Friday afternoon, my secretary came to my office and said she had a question. She was wondering why my religion allows men to have more than one wife but the women are not allowed to have more than one husband.

Late Friday afternoon, I have a hard time discussing anything especially after 2 o' clock. I just want to get the week over with and go home. I told her to think about this issue over the weekend and I will definitely discuss it on Monday.

She was a good secretary. She followed the instructions and marched in my office on Monday morning. Before I could say anything, she told me she had thought it through and it would not work. Upon my asking how she arrived at that conclusion, she said for one thing you wouldn't know who the father of a child is. It just does not fit in the scheme of nature.

"Love thy enemy", "Turn the other cheek" are some of the clichés people hear in the church. They all sound good and make them feel graceful but what do they mean? When they walk out of the church do they really think they can act

on them? Or do they even understand what they imply in one's character. Do they even know anyone who really has practiced these things?

I know the way one person understood it. He had a sign outside his shop on Peterson Ave. "Love thy enemy, it'll drive him crazy."

We have heard in the mosque so many times, "Islam is a religion of nature." What does it really mean? Is it something that sounds good and therefore we are happy to hear it? We feel good when we walk out of the mosque that our religion is unique. What are the practical implications of this statement? Do we even know how nature interacts with a religion?

The basic rule that exists in nature is death. Nature kills unless you defend yourself. Let me say for the computer buffs, death is the 'default' in the nature's program. If we don't wear clothes and find shelter, nature would kill us.

Nature can bring us viruses and make us sick. If we don't take medicine, it would mean death. It is the same rule in the spiritual world. Unless we make an effort to protect ourselves, we will face a spiritual death by default. Islam provides that protection.

Another way to look at it is that Islam's teachings are based on human nature. The segregation of sexes in mixed company is something that westerners laugh at. They call it backward and fundamentalism.

Watch what happens at a mixed cocktail party of the Westerners. Within half an hour, ladies start gathering on one side and men on the other. Their conversations are different. Men talk about sports and politics. I have no idea what ladies

talk about because I don't hang around them to find out. I could try to guess it but that could get me in trouble. The point is that they mingle in groups because the nature demands it. They are much more comfortable in their group to express themselves.

It is due to nature's requirement that men are allowed to be married with more than one wife. This allowance actually comes in the context of war, which results in orphan girls. Men get killed in the war. The ratio of women becomes much higher than the surviving men. Either they will be on the streets, become prostitutes or die of hunger and disease. Islam tells the surviving men to take care of them. Take them as legal wives and have legal children with them. They will inherit property and live with respect. Unlike the Western culture, it would not allow them to have mistresses. Of course, the allowance is open as an option for many conditions. War is only an example.

If you look for a solution in line with nature, it is the teachings of Islam. My secretary found that out; on her own. That is why it is the religion of nature.

Islam is also a religion of nature because nature enforces its teachings.

When I came to the USA, there was a sexual revolution going on in America. I had to take a test for syphilis because Vietnam vets were getting it from fornication.

People want to commit sin and plan to ask forgiveness from God, but nature punishes them before they get the chance to ask for mercy. By the time they found some solution for syphilis, another disease called herpes took over. By the time something was discovered to suppress Herpes, the Aids virus showed up. I emphasize that they are only able to suppress

these diseases, not cure them.

Nature can be brutal when it comes to commandments involving sexual activity.

Any problem you see in the society, higher divorce rate, abortion problems, teenage suicide and pregnancy are all results of violating the teachings of Islam. Thousands of people die on the highways each year because the commandment not to drink alcohol is violated. Politicians don't make a big deal of this, knowing that it kills many times over the number of people killed at the World Trade Center on 9/11. It would have a devastating effect on their congressional cocktail parties.

Nature always takes over and punishes the society for wrongdoing. It's the resultant widows, orphans and parents losing their young sons and daughters, which is the real tragedy.

Some of the teachings may not look clear to us how they fit in nature. We know that most of the teachings, as we see them and experience them, fit the criteria. We must conclude that the rest of them must also be consistent with that principle.

There is a very basic thing in nature about which the Holy Qur'an has given us direction. Work in the daytime and get rest and sleep at night. Most of the crime takes place at night. That is when all the bad elements come out. The animals as well as the humans come out of their holes. If only this basic instruction was followed, nature would help lower the crime.

Just think about any situation or problem and look for a solution consistent with nature. It will bring you to the teachings of Islam. Your conscience would give you the answer.

Remember this rule: When your conscience tells you do something, don't argue with it.





Celebrating Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is great, well maybe not for the turkeys. Turkey is a true American feast. It is one thing that just does not work with curry spices. I have seen families trying to induce curry condiments into the baking bird. It did not do much to the taste of the turkey other than messing up an otherwise good feast. Maybe those friends would not make me go through the misery after reading this. It has to be made the American way. Fried turkey is not American. It must be baked three to four hours. All the trimmings including the cranberry sauce and sweet potatoes are essential for a thanksgiving dinner.

History of Thanksgiving is not clear. Various accounts exist. It is like the Kennedy assassination. We will never know. Maybe it was thanksgiving for friendship between the Pilgrims and the Indians. Maybe the Indians were thankful that they were not shot at on that day. We know for sure that they ate turkey with the trimmings and called it the Thanksgiving. I'll go along with any story for a good dinner.

For all I know, it may have been just another holiday to kick off the Christmas shopping season.

I know of one historical account in reference to Thanksgiving that is accurate. President Truman, in 1949, thought it would be interesting to send a turkey as a gift to the President of Turkey on Thanksgiving. Turkish President had no idea what he was going to receive. He was surprised to see that a representative of the United States of America delivered a dead bird to him and obviously could not believe all the fuss over it. At least he would have been prepared if they had told him that he was getting a “hindi” as a gift on Thanksgiving. You see, in Turkey in those days, a turkey was called a “hindi”. The word just signified something foreign and exotic like something from India.

Being thankful is important. We need to be thankful to God, to our parents and anyone else who does something good for us.

God has told us that if we are thankful, it is for our own benefit. When we are thankful, we get more gifts. Someone gives me a gift and I put it in the garage. Next time that person visits me and sees where his gift ended up, I don't think he would put me on his gift list in the future. On the other hand, he may see that I put his gift on the mantle above the fireplace in the living room. That would make him happy and he would know that I appreciated his gift. There are ways to show appreciation.

The Holy Prophet^{saw} said: Whoever is not grateful to people, he is not grateful to God.¹ It is not just a saying that sounds good; it has a lot of wisdom in it.

We see our parents taking care of us. They go to work and make a living, bring groceries to feed us and provide us clothing and shelter. The philosophy of God really providing

all these things is pretty deep. It takes an understanding of the unseen and how Allah is the Provider of everything.

Let us assume someone says that he is thankful to God. However, he does not show any appreciation for his parents and is not thankful to them. It is not possible for him to be thankful to God when he is not thankful to someone who physically provided him provisions. He is fooling himself. He refuses to accept what he sees with his physical eyes, but claims to believe the unseen. That is the meaning of the Holy Prophet^{saw}'s saying.

Another way to look at that saying is to think about how Allah works. He does not come down in person and deliver us groceries. He uses our parents to do that. Are we not supposed to say thanks to the one delivering us the gifts from God?

When we need a job, God does not come down and hand us a job. He uses a human being to provide a job to us. We have to be thankful to the person who was the vehicle in our hour of help. That is why people are thankful to their bosses. We should not believe that the boss is our provider because God is the only Provider. However, the boss is the intermediary and someone God has assigned as a medium to help. We have to say thanks to the messenger and the delivery boy. Just as we tip every boy who delivers us the pizza and say "thank you" on top of it. And yet we pay for the pizza.

God has given us many gifts. Every human being is born unique and with special abilities. He is the Unique Creator. Children born in the same house, eating the same food, attending the same schools and breathing the same air have different talents. Some are good at math or science and others at poetry and literature.

The way for us to be thankful for the gift of God is to reach our potential. That is our thanksgiving. If we don't avail the abilities God gave us and don't utilize them, then we are not being thankful. If God gave us the talent to be a scientist, then we should not choose to work at a carwash. It is like the gift that ends up in the garage. If we use these gifts, then God bestows even more gifts on us. Now you see why Allah said that it is for your benefit if you are thankful.

Thankfulness to God equates to believing in God. If you really believe in God, it is not possible to be ungrateful. Allah has used the word "thankfulness" (*Shukr*) and has used the word "denial" of his existence (*Kufr*) as the opposite. In the Holy Qur'an chapter named *Luqman*, Allah states:

"Be thankful to Allah. Whoever is thankful (*Shukr*) of Allah, it is for good of his own soul. And whosoever denies His existence (*Kufr*), he should know that Allah is Self-Sufficient, Praiseworthy."¹⁸

God has given us so many things on this earth. How the earth produces the sweet potatoes and cranberry trees. How He created the food like turkey for us. Everything had to be in its right place at the right time. The sun, the moon, the air, the rain and the nutrients in the earth all worked together to produce the foods for our pleasure.

No matter what we discuss and how we discuss Thanksgiving, it all comes to food. It is definitely a good reason to be thankful on that day in November.

As for the turkeys, well, they can thank the Lord the other 364 days in the year that we only celebrate Thanksgiving once.



So eat of the lawful and good things which Allah has provided for you; and be grateful for the bounty of Allah, if it is Him you worship. He has made unlawful for you only that which dies of itself and blood and the flesh of swine and that on which the name of any other than Allah has been invoked. But he who is driven by necessity, being neither disobedient nor exceeding the limit, then surely, Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful. And say not — because of the falsehood which your tongues utter — ‘This is lawful, and this is unlawful,’ so as to forge a lie against Allah. Surely, those who forge a lie against Allah do not prosper.

CH16 R15



Giving up the Hog

Jethro and Stu were sitting on the porch shaving wood and trying to have a conversation. In the back woods country areas, it is hard to come up with topics of meaningful conversation.

Jethro: If you had two million dollars, would you give me a million of it?

Stu: Why would you even ask me a question like that? You know you are my friend. I love you like a brother. Absolutely, certainly if I had two million dollars I would give you a million of it.

Jethro: If you had two mansions, would you give me one of them?

Stu: I told you I loved you like a brother. I'll do anything for you. Certainly and surely if I had two mansions, I would give you one of them in an instant.

Jethro: How about if you had two cars, would you give

me one of them?

Stu: Certainly yes. Quit asking me this kind of question. I have told you if I come to get two of anything, I would surely give you one of them.

Jethro: What about if you had two hogs, would you give me one of them?

Stu: You know that ain't fair. You know I've got two hogs.

I am sure you have heard one version or another of the above joke. We are always trying to give away something we don't have. Many of us dream and pray (mind you very sincerely) that if we win the lottery, we will build a mosque or do other great charitable things. Maybe that's our way of bribing God for listening to our prayer.

Maybe that's how we have a way to appease our conscience that we are good people. We just don't have the opportunity to do big things. Maybe that's our way to buy dreams for a week by getting a lotto ticket for a dollar. A week's worth of dreams for a buck is sensational.

The problem with this phenomenon is that like Stu, we don't share what we already have. We are great in showing our desire to give away big things when we don't have them. Stu absolutely is not willing to give one of his hogs to Jethro but he would give him a million if he were to get hold of two million dollars.

We do not give our proper amount of contribution for the sake of God but are willing to build a mosque if we were to win the lottery. The fact is that if we don't share what we have

now, we probably would not change if we had more.

It is a misnomer that we can handle wealth better than others. More than 50% of lottery winners file bankruptcy or get in some kind of serious trouble. They all thought they could handle winning the lottery.

Giving in the way of God really does not have much to do with how much a person has. The closest friend of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} Abu Bakr^{ra} gave everything he had for the cause of Islam when the need arose. Hazrat Omar^{ra} sacrificed half of all of his possessions. In the eyes of God and of the Holy Prophet^{saw}, the rank of Abu Bakr^{ra} was much greater than that of Omar^{ra}. It didn't matter whether or not all of the wealth of Abu Bakr^{ra} was less than half of Omar's^{ra}. It was the level of sacrifice that mattered, not the amount.

The rich have a problem getting into heaven because they desire to multiply their wealth. It is a never-ending dream. The saying of Jesus^{as} is famous: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven." This should tell us how challenging it is to get over the desire of becoming wealthier at every stage of our lives and risking the entry into heaven.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} even explained it in simple words as to the fate of the rich. Usamah^{ra} relates that the Holy Prophet^{saw} said, I stood at the gate of Paradise and observed that the generality of those who entered were the lowly. The wealthy had been held back from it. ^K

There is another psychological angle to give what we don't have. We keep on putting off giving things to the future. The proper time to give is now, not next week, next month, next year or the uncertain time we wake up as millionaires.

Prophet Abraham^{as} set up the example of sacrifice at the time he was asked. He would not wait until he was ready and willing in the future. Lord asked him to sacrifice his son. He did not take time to sort things out. He did not say to the Lord, “Let me discuss it with my son and I will get back to you.” Analyze what he could have considered. Possibly consider different interpretations of his dream. Consider the fact that there could be another way to fulfill his dream. Like the Jews who started asking questions about the golden cow that needed to be destroyed. Asking the Lord what the color of the cow was, what kind of shape it had etc. You can buy a lot of time by asking silly questions.

Abraham^{as} was ready to give the sacrifice now, not tomorrow, next week or next month. His spirit of sacrifice was so great that Allah preserved his example until the Judgment Day through the Holy Prophet^{saw}. Muslims all over the world celebrate that spirit of sacrifice once a year on *Eid-ul Adhiya* day.

Sacrifice has nothing to do with the amount. It has to do with two things. What needs to be offered is what one has regardless of how little it is. And it must be offered at the time it is needed and asked for.

We have great examples to follow of sacrifices for the sake of God. We don't need to look at the example of Jethro and Stu. After all they are the country boys just trying to have idle talk, passing time. They are also not known for their mastery of information and knowledge.

Jethro and Stu were still sitting on the porch when a priest went by who had a caste on his arm. Jethro said “hullo” to the passing priest and asked him how his arm got broken.

The priest said that he fell in the bathtub, and he kept on going on his way. There was silence for a while until Jethro spoke up.

Jethro: Hey Stu, what is a bathtub anyhow?

Stu: How would I know, Jethro, you know I ain't Catholic!





BLASPHEMY

Monstrous Freedom

Freedom of speech is wonderful. People of various thoughts giving and sharing their views in different subjects are interesting to watch. Whether it is TV, newspaper or radio programs in America, we can find opposing views expressed on everything.

With the power of remote control, we can select and only listen to the people who confirm our views. I think it is called the “freedom of choice”. Before the remote control era, it was hard times. It was not just the limited number of channels but the effort required to get up from the sofa to change the channel.

Theoretically, at least, this hopelessness should have produced balanced views among Democrats and Republicans. They were stuck listening to both sides. I don’t think it helped. It just made us madder about the people of the other party as they hogged the time on TV.

In the cover of freedom of speech, some have misused this precious value. I am not referring to just the pornographic

literature and movies. I am talking about the indecent expressions in areas of religion and politics. I know that we cannot win any debate with any of the culprits on the principle of the First Amendment. However, we can discuss it on the basis of decency. Most specifically, we can discuss the area of blasphemy.

Most Americans probably don't know the definition of blasphemy. They know it has something to do with religion. That's something they don't want to get in an open discussion on. It would not be politically correct. Freedom of expression is limited by the barriers we have erected around it. We just don't want to admit it. That will also be politically incorrect.

Defining blasphemy is very simple. If you call me some filthy names and make insulting remarks about me, you will be considered an indecent person. The decency in our society requires that you do not use foul and filthy language about another person. If you were to make the same kind of remarks about God or one of the religious figures such as prophets, you will be considered to be blasphemous. Blasphemy is simply indecent talk about a divine person or God Himself.

Salman Rushdie was not the first person to write blasphemy against the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}. Even the Pope announced that he considered his book to be blasphemous. Muslims showed an emotional reaction and Ayatollah even announced a price on his head.

The debate about this man centered on freedom of expression and not on decency. The simple fact is that he was being indecent and therefore committed blasphemy. The punishment for blasphemy is not death. Actually it is nothing. It is left to God.

The biggest blasphemy that people spoke about God had to do with Mary^{as}, the mother of Jesus^{as}. The allegation has been made that Jesus^{as} is a begotten Son of God. This implies that God had a relationship with Mary^{as} as His wife (God forbid). In the Holy Qur'an, Allah has referred to it in the following words:

“No knowledge have they thereof, nor had their fathers. Monstrous is the word that comes out of their mouths. They speak nothing but a lie.”¹⁹

The relevant thing in this discussion to note is that no corporal punishment or physical punishment by any human being is prescribed in the Holy Qur'an.

In relation to the same incidence, the Jews also committed blasphemy against Mary^{as}. She was a pious woman, but the Jews blamed her for having an illegitimate child. The Holy Qur'an refers to it as a grievous calumny or a grievous false charge against her. It says: “For their disbelief and for their uttering against Mary^{as} a grievous calumny”.²⁰ Yet no punishment was prescribed.

The Holy Qur'an has termed these blasphemies against God and Mary^{as} as the monstrous word and a grievous insult. Yet, the feelings of today's Muslims have not been agitated enough to put a price on the head of every Christian and Jew. But, when it comes to blasphemy against the Holy Prophet^{saw}, it is a different story altogether.

There was a case of blasphemy against the Holy Prophet^{saw} in his lifetime. It was of such seriousness that the Holy Qur'an mentioned it in *Surah Al-Munafiqoon*.

I need to give you some background of this story.

Abdullah bin Ubbye was the leader of Medina. He had politically situated himself such that all the tribes including the Jews in Medina chose him as their king. His crown was on order and as soon as it arrived, the ceremonies would begin.

Meanwhile, the Muslims of Medina invited the Holy Prophet^{saw} to migrate to Medina, which he accepted. The presence of the Holy Prophet^{saw} in Medina was noticeable and it became obvious that Abdullah had no chance of being the king of Medina. The real king had arrived and the whole city knew it.

Abdullah would make disgusting remarks about the Holy Prophet^{saw} and make plans against him. While on the surface, he had accepted Islam. The remarks referred to in the Holy Qur'an state that he called the Holy Prophet^{saw} "the meanest" or the lowest of all the people in Medina (God forbid). He also made the claim that the noblest person of Medina (meaning Abdullah himself) would drive out the meanest from the city.

Aside from the fact that God or the Holy Prophet^{saw} did not issue any verdict of punishment for Abdullah, Muslims were furious. Upon one indication from the Holy Prophet^{saw}, any Muslim would have killed Abdullah. No such punishment was to be given for the blasphemy against the Holy Prophet^{saw}.

Here is the interesting opportunity that came up. Abdullah's son came to the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} and asked for his permission to kill his father.¹ His argument had to do with the tribal customs among the Arabs. He stated that if someone else kills him, his tribe would take revenge even if it takes many generations. But, if he kills his own father, there

will be no revenge. The tribe cannot take revenge against itself. Later on, the Holy Prophet^{saw} forbade him to take any such step. He told him to leave his father alone. The Holy Prophet^{saw} even performed the funeral prayer of Abdullah against the objections of his companions.

There are always going to be people with filthy mouths and indecent expressions. They don't just exist in ignorant and uneducated people living in the third world countries. They exist in the land of the free also.

You see it has nothing to do with freedom of speech. It has to do with standards of decency

The Rev. Falwell called the Holy Prophet^{saw} a terrorist and other hateful names. All he did was to reflect his indecency and ignorance. It shows the kind of indecent social circle he belonged to. Freedom of speech helps to get one's filth out in public.

Muslims are commanded in the Holy Qur'an not to insult other religions or their leaders, not even the idols. It takes patience but we need to show that we are decent people and will not abuse the right of freedom of speech.

That is the principle that can set us free





Hail the Chief

The elephant and the donkey have started to look alike.

I am not referring to the anatomy of the gentle creatures. I am actually talking about the Republicans and the Democrats. In the last 30 to 40 years, they keep on shifting their positions such that there is not much difference among them anymore.

The election results of the past few years kind of reflect my observation. The votes have been split just about in the middle. It means that the voters perceive one candidate to be as good as the other one. You can also say that they figure one as bad as the other. I guess it depends on how the pollsters ask the question.

The two-party system is a subsection of the system of government. In order to discuss anything about the party system, I must talk about the concept of having the best kind of government.

The Holy Qur'an basically is not against any form of government. There have been emperors and kings in history. The Holy Qur'an has confirmed some of them as Prophets of God. King David^{as}, Solomon^{as}, Talut^{as} and many others are the examples of the combination of Monarchy and being the Messengers of God. God has praised them for their exercise of justice. So Monarchy by itself is not evil. However, the Holy Qur'an has given the preference of a democratic system and parameters for the best government.

We are told in Chapter *Shura* of the Holy Qur'an that the authority must do mutual consultations in trying to reach decisions.²¹ The consultation system is the democracy it suggests to establish. The system can be in any form. Depending on the social, economic and educational structure of the society, a suitable system can be established. It can be the Parliament, Congress, Senate, General Assembly or *Shura*. Any form would work as long as it is representative of people and set up to discuss the public issues.

This brings me to the system of voting to elect the authority and/or the consulting body.

The Holy Qur'an does not consider a vote to be the right of a citizen. It calls it a trust and thus it is an obligation, not just a right. It is a trust given to a person by God and he must discharge it with integrity. By voting for a person, he is not doing him any favor. The person who gets the vote does not owe anything in return. The voter discharges his trust by voting for the best person in his assessment and fulfills his responsibility. If he votes for any other reason then he is answerable to God. It is God's commandment that he should discharge his trust in the best manner according to the Holy Qur'an.²²

Just imagine an election like that. The politicians don't

owe anything to the people who voted for them. The voters have no demands from the people whom they voted for. The politicians decide things on the merits of issues, instead of special interest considerations. Lobbyists lose their jobs.

Islam also establishes the rule that no one should be given a public office if he desires it. There goes the option of voting for yourself. Even running for an office goes against this principle. The whole process of candidates making promises disappears. People propose the names of suitable people and endorse them to be elected. No filthy campaigns can take place. The only principle behind negative campaigning is that you claim you are better than the other person. Well, that is arrogance. That also establishes that you really want that position, so you are disqualified. It is truly a simple and clean system.

By now you should be able to see how the idea of political parties becomes useless. A person would vote for someone not because he is Republican or Democrat but because he is the most suitable for the position. If a Republican knows that the Democrat is best for the job, he must vote for him. Otherwise he is answerable to God for not discharging his trust properly.

Once the government is established, the Holy Qur'an requires two things from it.

It must take care for the four basic needs of the public. Holy Qur'an describes:

“It is provided for thee that thou wilt not hunger therein, nor wilt thou be naked. And thou wilt not thirst therein, nor will thou be exposed to the sun.”²³

This basically covers the four necessities of every citizen; food, clothing, water and shelter. We need the example of Hazrat Omar^{ra} in history in relation to this responsibility. He would go around the outskirts of the city to find if there was anyone who was going hungry. He even would haul the food bags on his back to deliver them to the needy. Hail to the king who is the servant of the people.

Being the Monarch, he felt his responsibility to his citizens under the above commandment of God. The third world countries have the worst record in this regard. However, the advanced countries, like the USA, have not taken care of the homeless and hungry either. The focus needs to be changed to fulfill the commandment of God.

The other principle that God has established for the government is that it must act in absolute justice. The Holy Qur'an even says: "Let not a people's enmity incite you to act otherwise than with justice."²⁴ So even if we have political parties, the rule of justice must not be ignored.

This answers the question of what to do with the people who are in minority in a country. Whether it is a religious or political minority, it must be dealt with absolute justice. The ruling authority must not impose their faith or views on others just because they are smaller in number. It sort of connects with the issue of freedom of religion.

Until we get to the point where principles established by Islam will be established, we must deal with the system we live in. We must pick the elephant or the donkey. We must discharge our responsibility of voting and pray.

I read a poem in 1968 about the elections and I still

remember it. I don't know who the author was, but he did have a footnote on it. Here is how it goes:

The election is over,
The result is known.
The will of the people
Is clearly shown.
So let's forget the quarrels
And show by our deeds.
We'll give our leader
All the help that he needs.
So let's all get together
And let bitterness pass.
I'll hug your elephant
And you kiss my *donkey*!

Note: It doesn't rhyme, but I am working on it.

I wonder if it was a Democrat who wrote it?





Who is in charge?

Pope John Paul II was in the last hours of his life. Television cameras and news reporters were gathered in large numbers all over Vatican waiting for him to die. They gave us the suspense of reporting and letting us know at each hour how the Pope was about to die.

It seemed that there was something wrong with this picture. It is awful that anyone, let alone hundreds of cameramen and news reporters, would be waiting for anyone to die so they can report it “LIVE”. But, the media had gotten us prepared for this process.

You see, just before the Pope’s passing away, the media was doing the same thing with Terri Schiavo and she was not even a Cardinal. I agreed with Andy Rooney on 60 Minutes when he said that the Pope’s death had one good thing and that was the media got off the reporting of Terri Schiavo’s passing away.

It was amazing how the media expanded the coverage on Terri’s situation. They brought in dozens of physicians

debating and giving their position on the condition of Terri. It was not enough that the physicians, who had attended, examined and watched Terri had already given their opposing views and reports. We were even given statements by physicians who received the information about her just as we did, from TV and news articles. It appeared that it was a major issue in the country involving the medical profession.

It really was not a medical issue. Every day, in our country, there are patients in vegetative states about whom the attending physicians give their opinions to their families. In many cases, there are no clear-cut opinions because the physicians are not sure about what to suggest. Human body is a complicated affair.

The families consider the opinions and make a decision collectively either to pull the plug or leave it alone for the time being. None of this reaches the media because the families have consensus of their decision among all its members.

Over the ages, the physicians have defined death in different ways. Does it take place when the heart beat stops or when the brain stops functioning? These are definitions of “clinical death” which the medical profession keeps on defining in different terms based on their knowledge, research, experience, and experiments. Their definition is only to determine the point at which they give up and stop the medical treatment of the patient.

The real death of a human being takes place when the soul departs from the body. I don't know if we will ever know the time it takes place.

The knowledge of soul is hidden from us. Gods has told us in the Holy Qur'an: “The soul is with the command of

my Lord, little is the knowledge thereof you have been given”.²⁵ There is not much information available on soul because that will give us the inroad to the next life. Again that information God has kept to Himself. We have some clues but they are only to give us enough information so we believe in it.

In essence, the physicians or anyone else cannot say for certainty at what point the soul departs from the body. So all we can determine is the clinical death based on the medical science available to us at the particular period of time. The media, however, confused the general public by having the physicians use medical terminology, which is mostly in Latin. Maybe it was fun to watch it in Italy.

The real fiasco in Terri Schiavo’s case took place because there was no consensus among the family members. The husband had a different view after listening to all the physicians than the views of her parents. He was also considering the verbal instructions of Terri about such a situation that he believed must be honored.

The real issue was: who is in authority, the husband or the parents? The situation becomes very simple once we can establish that in such cases whose opinion is the final word. Someone has to be in-charge. Should the final call be made by the husband, father, mother, attending physician, priest or the Pope?

The Holy Qur’an in mild and nice term has appointed the husband as the “guardian” over his wife.²⁶ It is a very obvious and clear authority given to the husband. Under the Islamic law, the husband can make the final call as the guardian.

Terri belonged to a Catholic family. So what does the Bible say about such authority? The Bible is much stronger on

the side of the husband. It actually portrays the husband as the “master” of his wife. The tenth commandment lists the wife among the property of the neighbor along with his house and the donkey.

The father loses his guardianship as soon as the daughter is married. According to Book of Numbers 30:3-8; she comes under the headship of her husband. Also according to Romans 7:2; the woman is bound by the law to her husband. You can also look up the New Testament Ephesians 5:23 and 1Peter 3:1 if you want more references.^a

It was a simple thing that once the authority of the husband is established, Michael Schiavo’s decision should be honored.

Isn’t it amazing that even the Christian Right did not point this out to their friends in Congress and the White House when they got involved in this mess? Maybe it was not politically correct. Maybe they could not face the ladies in their congregation. Maybe it was prudent for them to put the Bible aside for this one time.

Once the husband makes a decision, a question may be raised about his motives. What if he is being malicious or even criminal in his intentions and not being the sincere “master” (according to Bible) or a responsible “guardian” (according to Qur’an)? The matter can be taken to the court of law. The judge can decide from the circumstances if the husband is making a sincere decision or is being criminal. By the way, in this case, it was brought to the courts over 20 times and the husband’s stand was confirmed.

In my view, the whole fiasco was this simple: Accept the husband’s authority and let the judge approve it and everything

is done. Parents submit to the Word of God. Physicians got paid for their services, did the best they could and gave their honest opinions to the husband for a prudent decision. Terri Schiavo moved on to the next world.

Actually the situation can be complicated if the husband was in a vegetative state. Who is in authority then? Well, let us leave this for another time.

You know, all of this could be a lot simpler if Terri had left a written will stating what should be done if this situation arose. A few dollars for an attorney could have saved a lot of time of many physicians from their busy schedules.

Verbal instructions just don't do the trick. As it is said: "Verbal agreement is not worth the paper it is written on".





For the Love of God

I have seen poor people standing on the side of streets whether I am taking a stroll on Kalakaua Ave in Honolulu, walking through Bourbon Street in New Orleans or rushing to the train station on Madison Ave in Chicago. Some of them could be homeless as well; I couldn't tell.

Helping the poor is part of the reason congregations are asked to give God's share of the money in the mosques, churches, synagogues and temples. There are comedians who make jokes that if God is the Most powerful, Mighty and the King of kings, why does He need money. I find jokes about God distasteful. Taking advantage of the freedom of speech in our nation, some make a living making indecent remarks in public. No matter which amendment you use; distasteful expressions are just that.

I know by definition God does not need any money. So why are we asked to give Him money or why does He ask us to give to others? Why couldn't He give some to the poor and keep us out of the loop. That would keep our conscience clear.

I have discovered that when I don't understand something about God, I look at it in the concept of love and it becomes manifestly clear. When my Christian friends ask me why I don't eat pork, I don't get in the debate over what is and isn't wrong with pork. I tell them that I don't eat it because God has asked me to refrain from it. For the love of Him, I have given up just one meat. I have plenty of other meats, lamb, beef, chicken and fish to select from. If my children cannot stand lamb kidneys or brains, we don't cook them at home. Not because we can't but because our feelings for our children. So why is it so strange that I gave up one item of food for the affection and love of God?

It all has to do with the joys and feelings of love for someone.

A father walks in his house after work with a box of chocolates in his hand. He gives it to his four years old son and tells him that he brought the chocolates he loves so much for him. The smile on the son's face is only part of the reason he does it.

Before the toddler has even opened the box, his father tells him to share it with his older brother and sister. Then he watches him. If he goes ahead and gives a few pieces to his siblings, father's eyes lit up with pride and happiness. He says thank you to him. As soon as the toddler has put the first piece of chocolate in his mouth, the father says: Aren't you going to give me some also? It is his proud moment again when he gets the candy from his son.

In case the toddler refuses, the father shows his displeasure and even threatens that he wouldn't bring chocolates for him anymore if he wouldn't share. Most sons give up. Just the thought of being deprived in the future scares them.

What is wrong with this picture? Why do fathers all over the world do this intuitively? Why don't they just come home and divide up the candies equally among the children, have some for themselves and everybody would be happy?

It is for the spreading of feelings of love why they do it. In the simple episode, feelings of love are generated among the siblings, father and son and the bonding of family is accomplished.

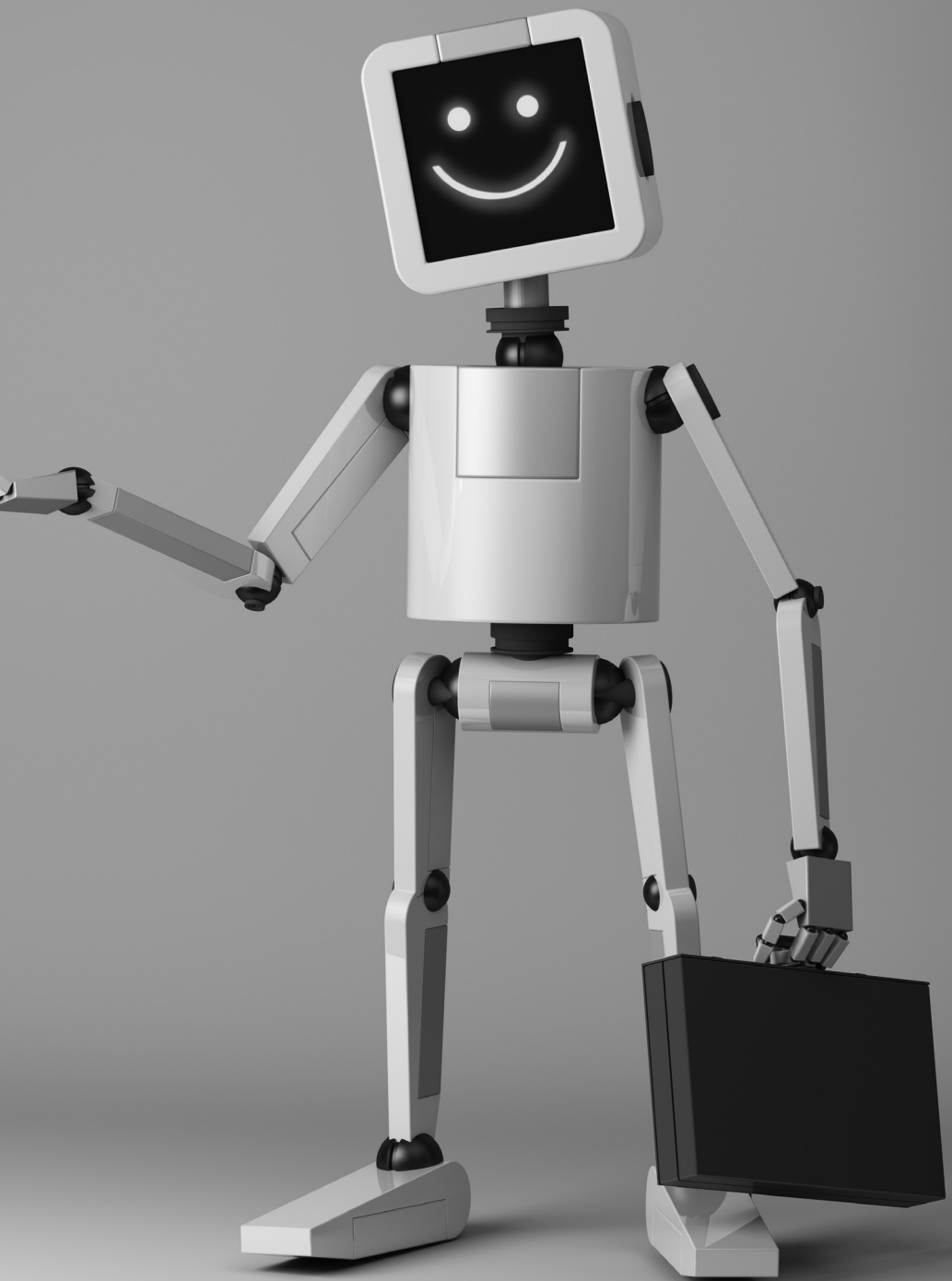
When God gives us wealth and then tells us to share it with our brothers and sisters and spend for Him, it is to spread the love among humanity. Is it any different than what fathers do every day in all cultures?

We need to share whatever we have with others to create love and affection in the world. I know I should do more to help the poor brothers and sisters. I could, from time to time, spend a twenty-dollar bill and buy 20 double cheeseburgers from the dollar menu at Macdonald's and offer them to twenty poor people outside a kitchen soup. I am sure eating soup everyday gets monotonous. Double cheeseburger could bring out some smiles. It takes initiative, time and effort but it is worth the love it would generate.

It does not have to be the big amounts that can make the difference. Imagine the love a five-dollar box of chocolates creates in a household. A hundred dollar could bring results that we could be surprised at.

I hope you would also feed some poor brother or sister for the love of God, whether you are on Bourbon Street in New Orleans or on Madison Ave in Chicago. I think I'll go to Honolulu next month and feed some homeless people on the beach.

Just for the love of God.



World Of Robots?

Whenever a natural disaster strikes and we watch the devastation on TV, our hearts get the sinking feeling. We see a tsunami with bodies floating everywhere and we feel sick. An earthquake takes place anywhere in the world and we see bodies being pulled from the fallen buildings and our hearts bleed.

We feel helpless and in our own ways extend whatever help we can to help the victims. These are people we don't even know but our love of humanity overtakes all other feelings. Some of us ask the question: how could God let this happen?

Since God is described as the Most Merciful, how could He let devastation take lives away, break families apart, make orphans and widows and cause so much disease?

Although these questions are particularly raised at the onset of just about any natural catastrophe, some of us have a lot more to complain about than just that.

Why would God take the life of a few months old baby

and have the parents feel the devastation?

Why are there ugly people in the world? Couldn't He make them all good looking and cute?

Why are some people healthy all their lives and some suffer so much through disease that it is hard to even watch them suffer? Why couldn't He make everyone healthy?

Why doesn't everyone get to be the same old age? About a range of 95 to 110 could be acceptable. We can debate about a good figure and let God know.

What about the size of noses on people's faces? I'll let it fall in the category of creating everyone beautiful.

If God were to accept this line of thinking, we would end up with a world in which all human beings would be of the same color, size, shape, features, age and same cause of death. Everyone would have the same job and same pay—a world of robots.

What purpose would a world of robots serve? For starters, the billions of dollars fashion industry would not exist.

God's plan was to create human beings and give them choices and creative faculties for constant improvement and watch them grow physically and spiritually. He has seen us performing wonders in the physical world by making inventions, overcoming diseases, finding cures, continually improving our life span and discovering means of comfort in our physical lives. He has also seen us achieve the high levels of spirituality. In every age He saw humans who achieved the levels of even being prophets, having the honor of spiritual status where He would converse with them.

In the world of robots, none of this would happen or be required. It would be a useless and monotonous world. God

and the robots both could do without it. It is obvious God does not want robots. Even His angels have different number of wings and serve different functions while their choice of good and evil is not there.

Natural disasters take place because that is how the living nature works. The land shifts, mountains settle, lava erupts and the oceans get bigger and smaller. What we face in all that is just part of nature.

It is the devastations that give us reason to improve ourselves. When a new disease spreads, we put everything at our disposal to find the cure for it. God has a cure for every disease on this earth. We have to go find it and in the process, we become more knowledgeable of nature and have more command over matter around us.

It is not God's fault that these changes in nature take place. It is His design to challenge us. If humans did not have these challenges, they would not be any different than animals. We would have a severely limited function on earth and could not possibly have achieved the wonders we are proud of. He is Love and He it is who instilled the feelings of love in us for others when devastation takes place.

Let us appreciate the system God provided us and keep on marching forward. Enjoy the different colors, shapes, sizes and beauty of the human beings around us. It is like the flowers of different colors, fragrances and shapes. Each one is beautiful and is delicate in its own way.

When we make them come together in a bouquet, it is wonderful.

Thank God for not making us robots.



The Mosque Culture

When I first departed for America in 1966, I was seen off by my entire family at the Pakistani airport. In those days there were about 15 relatives and friends for each departing passenger. I said my good byes to my mother and other relatives, but there was a bigger hurdle – my Dad.

When it came time to finally say good bye to my father, we said the usual formalities and words of *salaam*. I could see his eyes full of love, affection and prayers for me but I sensed an uneasiness of him holding something back. Although I knew he was shy and reserved, I thought he might hug me. It didn't happen. Public displays of affection were a bit awkward for my Dad.

While I was walking up the stairs of the airplane, I looked back at him still standing in clear view. His eyes still fixed on me full of love, affection and prayers, holding back the pain of losing a son and the fear that the words he didn't say might always remain unsaid. I thought I would come back in two or three years and I would give him that hug, knowing full well that if I didn't initiate it, it wasn't going to happen.

As it turned out, I did return to Pakistan after about three years, but he wouldn't be there to receive me. He had passed away three months after I left him at that airport. That was my last memory of my father. I never got that hug. That feeling of awkwardness is now one of frustration. I wonder if he ever realized how much I appreciated him and the sacrifices he made for us, his children. The frustration and helplessness of not being able to hug him for the last time or hearing what was on his mind manages to squeeze a few tears from my eyes and life goes on.

I arrived in Chicago and a few days later went to the local mosques for the first time. It was a strange experience for me. I was used to going to the mosque where everyone spoke the same language, was from the same area and was brought up in the same culture. The mosques here were different in many ways.

There were only about five Pakistanis and one member from India. The majority of the congregation was black. Yes, back then we referred to African Americans as blacks. There were blacks, whites and I guess we were somewhere in between. It was an era which proudly produced the "black is beautiful" slogan. They spoke English and obviously were from a different culture.

I saw faces of ladies at the mosque, whereas, back in Pakistani mosques, women could not be seen. They used to be on the other side of a wall. We knew they were there from the noise that came from that side but it was left to our imagination what they all looked like.

At this mosque, men were referred to as 'brothers' and all the ladies were 'sisters' even the Pakistani ones. I could even

see the faces of Pakistani sisters.

Talking to the sisters was an awkward process. I was not accustomed to talking with women. I never knew what to say to them or what would get me in trouble. Like my father at the airport, I smiled, looked embarrassed and blushed but did not express myself. This embarrassment was multiplied by the handicap of speaking in a new language.

Talking to the African American brothers was also awkward because I couldn't speak English that fluently and I had to learn their unique accents and phrases. So most of the time we simply said *salaam* to each other and the usual how are you expressions and smiled. Then I would turn to the Pakistani members and talk in Urdu or Punjabi about what was happening. We discussed world problems and how the Pakistani government lacked the aptitude to solve its problems. Forty five years later, we still discuss it. Obviously the Pakistani government still hasn't listened to us and we're not wise enough to give up.

My lack of interaction with the African American Muslims was not due to any thought of being superior to them. That never entered my mind. I never felt any inclination that they were in any way inferior to white people. My hesitation was because of the language and culture. Among all my closest friends, I don't know of anyone who believes whites are superior to any other race. It's simply backward thinking.

It is true that people in the sub-continent of India generally admire lighter complexion, but this is strictly a legacy from the British Empire. People tend to mimic those in power. Beauty is a physical manifestation of socially desired values. For example, those who have wealth in India and Pakistan tend to not have to work the fields, so their skin is lighter. There,

lighter skin is considered a trait of beauty. On the contrary, those who have wealth in the West tend to have more time for leisure in the sun and enjoy getting tanned. The West sees people with dark tans as a trait of beauty. However, those deeply rooted in Islam see righteousness as the socially desired value and therefore, cannot associate that with any physical attribute. Islamic beauty is seen as a spiritual manifestation.

Our female members also have cultural barriers communicating and socializing with the African American sisters. Many of our ladies are not fluent in English because they choose not to work. When they see other ladies from their own culture they like to talk about clothes and jewelry. African American sisters don't wear the same clothes or the same jewelry. Shoes are probably the only common element but that simply can't sustain much of a conversation, although I'm sure some women will prove me wrong. Our ladies are cordial and say *salaam* to the African American sisters but then move on to the comfortable arena in the mosque where they can speak in Urdu, Punjabi or Pashto.

Over the years, I have become close friends with many of the African American brothers. We can sit together without speaking a word and neither one would complain about one not saying something to the other. I have invited several to my home for dinner parties and have taken them to lunch or dinner at restaurants as well. I have noticed, though, that in all these years none of them has ever invited me to their homes. I never took it serious enough that I would stop inviting them but it got me to start thinking. It is like the hug I never got from my father. I don't profess to be a psychiatrist so I can't perform a self-diagnosis, but I would have been thrilled even if I was invited for hot dogs and coffee. Yes, I am one of the few Pakistanis who would boast of eating hot dogs and drinking black coffee. It is just the gesture of the invitation that would

have been significant. I know it is not because they don't like me or have no affection for me, we are otherwise a family.

As is the case with most families, we complain. Our African American brothers complain about Pakistani brothers who speak in their own languages in the mosque and not English. Now that immigration has driven the number of Pakistani members to be much higher, isolation of English speakers is more visible. It is a cultural phenomenon. After speaking the whole week in English at a job, you see your friends in the mosque and you want to converse and crack jokes in your native tongue. In Pakistan the Punjabi jokes are absolutely hilarious, but translating them into English is a sure way to kill the punch line, not to mention the fact it'll confuse the heck out of your audience.

Islam is a multi-cultural religion. It has adopted and adjusted to many cultures in the world. A wedding ceremony of a Muslim family in the Middle East is altogether different than one in Pakistan, Indonesia or Nigeria. Islam will also accommodate the American culture as it has done with others. It will take time. Our next generation will see some changes but I speculate that the generation after them will see Islam adapting to the American culture in a dramatic way. African Americans will be comfortable.

In the physical world we see some substances that naturally do not interact with others. There are other substances called emulsifiers which enable the others to mix. Islam is the emulsifier for humanity. It allows interaction while preserving identity.

People who join Islam should not expect to change a whole culture. They should make an effort to interact and appreciate the members they share the mosque with. They need

to live up to the religion they have accepted because there is much to learn. They would not be able to reach the spiritual heights if they get hung up on issues like someone else not saying *salaam* to them or talking to them in English. Initiate the hug instead of waiting for someone else to do so. Take it from me; you might be saving yourself from a lifetime of regret.

There is a lot to learn yet. The prayers in Arabic, understanding of the Holy Qur'an, wisdom from the quotations (*ahadith*) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}, and the Islamic upbringing of the children. Pakistanis are the ones who brought the treasure of Islam to African Americans. Now it is up to them to take it to the next level and possibly bring it to the Caucasians or Latino Americans. It is a way of life to be adopted and not just some Sufi rants and slogans.

I imagine some of my African American brothers who are close are going to try to invite me out after reading this. If that's what you're thinking...forget it! It's already too late. But seriously, that isn't the point, besides, my wife wouldn't eat hot dogs or drink coffee. Basically put, we all have cultural differences in our homes too. We just don't let that distract us from the lofty aspirations of Islam. It is for this reason that we are a family.

It sounds redundant but brothers and sisters are expected to be family.





Glorify the name of thy Lord, the Most High, Who creates and perfects, And Who designs and guides, And Who brings forth the pasturage, Then turns it black, rotten rubbish. We shall teach thee the Qur'an, and thou shalt forget it not, Except as Allah wills. Surely, He knows what is open and what is hidden. And We shall facilitate for thee every facility. So go on reminding; surely, reminding is profitable. He who fears will soon heed; But the reprobate will turn aside from it, He who is to enter the great Fire. Then he will neither die therein nor live. Verily, he truly prospers who purifies himself, And remembers the name of his Lord and offers Prayers. But you prefer the life of this world, Whereas the Hereafter is better and more lasting. This indeed is what is taught in the former Scriptures —The Scriptures of Abraham and Moses.

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Non-productive Critique

People like to criticize others. Criticism is not objectionable as long as it is not done just for the sake of it. There must be an objective to be accomplished when we criticize someone or something. There is no end to criticism if it is done for the fun of it, as Mullah Nasruddin found out.

Mullah Nasruddin is a character, real or fictional is open to debate, but his stories are well established in Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey. One day Mullah went to the market, taking his son with him. There he bought a donkey, and on the way home he let his son ride while he himself walked alongside on foot.

After they had gone some distance they came upon some people who began talking about the pair. "The world is getting crazier and crazier," they said. "That lout of a son is sitting there at ease on the donkey, making his old father walk alongside dripping with sweat."

Mullah heard this comment and had his son climb down, and he himself took a seat on the donkey's back. "Now

the people will be satisfied,” he murmured.

Soon they came upon another group who likewise were expressing their thoughts about Nasruddin and his donkey, and indeed, loudly enough that the Mullah could hear them. “Have you ever seen anything like that? That must be an unnatural father who makes his poor boy run on foot while he himself rides proudly along on the donkey!”

Mullah momentarily halted the donkey. “Climb up here with me!” he said to his son.

A short distance later they came upon another party, who likewise expressed their opinion clearly. “Such animal abuse! Isn’t that shameless for a cleric to torment such a poor donkey! Couldn’t the two of you use your own legs and give the donkey a little rest?”

Mullah stopped once again. “Let’s climb off!” he said to his son.

They both dismounted and walked along on foot beside the donkey. But they had not gone far when they came upon another group of people who also had something to say about them. They heaped ridicule upon them:

“Such a cheapskate! It’s just like him to buy a donkey and is then too stingy to use the animal.”

“He must be afraid that he will rub the fur off its body.”

“Which of the three is the greatest donkey?”

“They just might as well carry the donkey home.”

No sooner said than done! Mullah Nasruddin followed this advice.

As soon as the people had gone on their way he said to his son, “If you ever should come into the possession of a donkey, never trim its tail in the presence of other people. Some will say that you have cut off too much, and others that you have cut off too little. If you want to please everyone, in the end, your donkey will have no tail at all.”

The story ends in different versions. One version is that the Mullah and his son decided to carry the donkey on their shoulders since that was the only scenario left. While they were balancing the donkey crossing a bridge, the donkey fell down in the river. So the episode ended because without the donkey, there was no play.

In another version, Mullah told his son that you can never please the people, no matter what you do.

Mullah’s stories are repeated to bring up social issues for people to think about. The main thing to note is that all the people who criticized him did not offer an alternative. That is when criticism is useless, non-productive, just for fun and without any objective or purpose.

People criticize the Holy Qur’an and the Holy Prophet^{saw} of Islam all the time. What is their objective and purpose? What alternatives do they have to offer?

Holy Qur’an has stated emphatically many places as a challenge to others that they should try and bring another

chapter or even a verse like that is in the Qur'an.²⁷ It is not a statement of arrogance. It simply states that if you have a criticism or objection to any of the teachings in the Holy Qur'an then bring a substitute or alternative and compare the options. In the final analysis, you will find that the Holy Qur'an presents a teaching which is practical, morally sound, logical and in conformity with nature.

When Christians or Jews criticize the Holy Qur'an about the Jihad of the Sword while misquoting it most of the time, what do they offer in its place from the Bible? Read Chapter 20 verses 13 to 20 in the book of Deuteronomy which states that you should kill every male and take unto thyself all women, the little ones and the cattle. It further clarifies by the words: "thou shall save alive nothing that breatheth."b

If you would like to see an example from the New Testament, here it is. Read the quote of Jesus^{as} about his enemies:

"But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them--bring them here and kill them in front of me." Luke 19:26

Here is one more quotation of Jesus^{as} about his mission:

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Matthews 10:34

Even if you misinterpret the direction of the Holy Qur'an about Jihad, it is much better than the instructions in the above referenced verses from the Bible. Holy Qur'an commands that once the enemy lays down its arms, make peace with them. The Bible says once the enemy has lost, enslave all

women and children, kill all males and cut down all trees other than the fruit trees. Is this the alternative we are invited to?

The same holds true for the Holy Prophet^{saw} of Islam. Instead of just criticizing him, bring the example of another prophet and let us compare them. The Holy Prophet^{saw} was an orphan, husband, father, general, soldier, neighbor, statesman and a teacher. Bring an example of someone in any one of these categories and let us match him to the Holy Prophet^{saw} and see who comes out shining.

I know there are people who are going to keep on criticizing just like the ones in Mullah Nasruddin's town. They only reflect their ignorance and lack of sincerity. Holy Qur'an tells us that when we meet such people, we should just say *Salaam*, peace be on you, and keep going.

Of course if Mullah followed this commandment, I would have to look for another story to make my point. I know there are plenty of others.





My Weekend Woes

I cleaned up my desk on Friday afternoon. I shoved all the loose papers on my desk in the empty drawer in my desk reserved for this purpose. On Monday morning, I would dump the stack back on the top of the desk and spread it all over to make it look busy. Majority of the papers would age in this process. Over a short time, they would become irrelevant and would be shredded or given to my secretary so she could file them in the burial grounds of permanent files. I picked up my briefcase and left the office to go home for the weekend.

I walked pass a cubical where Jamal worked. He was also getting ready to clean up for the weekend. I did not know him much. I knew that he commutes from the inner city and is involved in some community work. I had a few conversations with him in the company cafeteria from time to time, but mostly about the quality of food. I said the customary words "Have a nice weekend". He responded by the usual "you too". However, there was an expression on his face that he wanted to say something more. I hesitated in anticipation and he started the conversation with a smile (maybe it was a smirk).

“I bet you have altogether a different outlook about the weekend than I do. You are thinking like others living in the suburbs that you would have to mow your lawn, drive your family for the weekly grocery shopping and have a dinner out with the family on Saturday night.”

“Well, what do you look forward to?”

“I am thinking that I probably would be called to get in the middle of some teenager holding a gun with a standoff with the police. My job would be to try to persuade him to give up his gun. Either he would get shot or go to jail; either outcome would not be pleasant. Or I would be helping some family grieve over their son or daughter who got shot in a drive-by shooting. The rest of the time, I would be spending in helping serve food in the soup kitchen.”

“I knew that you were involved in community work and I can see what you mean by a different outlook about the weekend.”

“If you don’t mind my asking how much do you contribute to the soup kitchens?”

“I have not given any direct contribution to any soup kitchen but I give donations to organization that I am sure pass some of the money to those places.”

“Have you ever asked those organizations how much they give to the soup kitchens for the hungry?”

“I am a small fish in a huge pond. My donations are not large enough that I can demand those explanations.”

“Have you ever been inside a soup kitchen?”

“No I haven’t. Once I was driving on South Michigan Ave and I saw a long line alongside a building. I was curious. So when I got closer I noticed that it was outside the door of a soup kitchen. We don’t have any soup kitchens where I live.”

“You don’t get to feel the plight of the hungry unless you look in the eyes of a man or woman or a child in the soup kitchen. Their eyes tell you the desperation and not knowing which soup kitchen they would go to for their next meal. I see that all the time and it gives me a different perspective on the problems of the hungry. Well, now you know what I look forward to every Friday afternoon. You have a nice weekend though.”

I did not know how far this conversation would go so I took the short cut by saying, “Well, see you on Monday.” Before he could say anything else, I was on my way to the parking lot.

During the weekend, while I was mowing the lawn and driving my wife to the grocery store, his conversation kept on hounding me. What could I do to help the poor and the needy? Am I supposed to be helping in the soup kitchens? As far as I knew the closest one would be an hour away. That could take just about half a day including the commute. That is not convenient at all.

How would I even start this process? Where would I park my car in the neighborhood where the soup kitchen is located? I am sure the charitable organizations give funds to the soup kitchens. I don’t know any friends in my suburban neighborhood who do this kind of service. I am sure those facilities have enough volunteers in the city to run their affairs. I don’t even know how many hungry people are out there

served by the soup kitchens. Why doesn't the government do something about it? There is no way that I could find time to get involved in community service. I even take work home on the weekends. Sometimes I have to show up at work on Saturdays just to impress the boss. At the least I should not complain about the company cafeteria food, especially at the subsidized prices.

Mowing the lawn and pushing the shopping cart seemed picnic time as compared to what Jamal would do in a weekend. Isn't that why people live in the suburbs so they don't have to face those issues? I have not lived in the city for years so I only read what is in the newspapers. That is like reading news about another country. My feelings about the problems in the inner city are hampered by the way of living in the suburbs; Out of sight, out of mind.

While I was having dinner with my family at the local restaurant, my head was still pounding. I wondered if the other families having dinner at the restaurant had such thoughts as I did. Does my family know how good they have? How many children are standing in those lines outside the soup kitchens so they can have a roll and a cup of soup? I have heard they give them a cookie too. Do their faces light up when they receive it or the fear of not knowing about the next meal keeps them from smiling? I don't know because I have never faced a hungry child other than in commercials. Those commercials never bothered me because I knew there was a cameraman and a director nearby and it was all staged. Maybe it wasn't.

On Monday morning, on my way to my office, I took a different way so I wouldn't run into Jamal. I am not ready to face the issues of inner city. It is a good thing there are people like Jamal in the world. It would take a while for me to recover from the thoughts he provoked in me. He probably would give

me details of how his weekend went. All I would have to say is “How was your weekend?” I get sick reading that stuff in the newspapers.

He already ruined my weekend by playing with my mind. I just didn’t want him to ruin my whole week.





The Blame Game

We love to blame others for the bad things that happen to us. It makes us feel better when we can point the finger at someone else. It also gives us a false sense of superiority since others are to blame. At the same time the focus to rehabilitate and refine shifts to others. It's a wonderful get out of jail card.

Unfortunately, most of our disasters are caused by our own hands. The Holy Qur'an has mentioned this in *Surah Al-Rum*.²⁸ It includes the problems that have become so large that no one seems to be able to find a solution

We blame the economic disaster on the government, the banking system, insurance companies, stock markets, the rich people and sometimes even God. After all...they make for easy targets. When I started thinking about this, I decided to narrow down the problem so I could get a handle on what I could analyze at a reasonable level. Medical costs in the USA are a major part of our economy and due to its rate of increase over the last few decades have affected our economy adversely. The President has even singled it out as the major cause of our economic recession.

In the blame game, we attack the hospitals, physicians, drug companies and insurance providers of health coverage. We have accomplished successfully to shift the burden of solution and responsibility to everyone but ourselves. The hospitals charge too much for aspirin, physicians perform unnecessary surgeries, drug companies are all working cohesively to sell us name brand drugs that don't cost them too much and the insurance companies collect premiums and find every which way not to pay our medical bills. There is some truth to all of this. But watch how none of the blame goes to us.

What about what we have done? Why do we require so much medical care? Let's simplify the discussion by leaving the obesity problem aside. Nature requires us to eat everyday and our food choices may be limited. So we'll leave that discussion for another day.

What about the consumption of items that nature does not require such as cigarette smoking, drinking alcohol and abuse of drugs? We have put so much burden on the health care system by these three habits that if they were not there, our health costs would come down by 80%. (Alright...I just made up the 80%, but I know it has to be a high percentage.) Let us not divert our discussion by arguing whether it is 70, 80 or 90%. We could Google it only to find it depends upon who calculated the percentage and what interest they had in the outcome.

Members of our society increase the medical costs by drinking alcohol. It is not just the harmful effects on one's own body and the resultant diseases of kidneys, heart and whatever else it causes. It is the injured that are treated after a drunk driver causes an accident. It is the battered women who need medical attention because the husband got drunk and one

thing led to another. The possibility of the resultant health care needs just due to drinking alcohol is tremendous which affects our economy.

The same holds true for smoking and substance abuse. All kinds of cancers are caused by smoking in addition to the blocked arteries, high blood pressure, and heart problems. How many billions of dollars are spent as part of health costs as a result of treatments required by smoking and substance abuse? I could look up the estimates in billions of dollars but it doesn't matter. We truly can't relate to how big one billion dollars is, but it is certainly bad for our economy.

Instead of blaming others, if we take the responsibility for our own behavior, the medical costs would come down and the economy and the deficit would absolutely get better. We are the public. We are the society. We are responsible for the high medical costs. We are responsible for the shape the economy is in. It is our unnecessary social behavior that has resulted in economic problems whether it is abuse of drugs or spending beyond our means.

The government cannot control our behavior through the laws. It can minimize the effects of our ill behavior but cannot eliminate it. There were prohibition laws that failed to accomplish the intended results. There are laws against the theft of property but jails are full of thieves.

We can only change our behavior when we want to, care to and are determined to do so. When Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} declared to his people to refrain from alcohol, they did it. They loved him and they loved God and showed by their determination to change their social behavior for the good. Their medical costs went down overnight.

It is the parents, the teachers and the clergy who have to work cohesively to change the social behavior instead of blaming each other. Parents have to show by example to refrain from these ill habits. The teachers must reinforce the example of parents. The clergy must be bold and valiant in their sermons for better spiritual and moral behavior and not worry about intimidating their congregation for fear of jeopardizing their church mortgage payments.

Blaming others has not worked. When a medicine does not work, the doctor prescribes a different one. So let's do ourselves a big favor and get out of the blame game. We may be pleasantly surprised at the results.

Who knows, there may be doctors looking for patients who can't be found? That would bring the fees way down. They may even start house-visiting again. It happened in the time of the Holy Prophet^{saw}. A king sent a physician to Medina to serve the Holy Prophet^{saw} and his community. He came back after a few months because there was not much for him to do. He explained the reasons for it too. People did physical work (no need for gyms) and they ate when they were real hungry and stopped eating while they still had a little hunger left (the best diet plan).

The bottom line is that our problems are as big or as small as we make them. We have a choice to acknowledge what we can do as individuals, even though we oftentimes overlook this option. If we all decided to do something as small as picking up one piece of garbage in public parks and putting it in the waste bin, imagine what impact that would have multiplied by the over 6 billion people on the planet. Playing out our individual responsibilities will have faster and more effective results if we just gave it the chance...yet the blame game goes on...



Has there come to thee the news of the overwhelming calamity? Some faces on that day will be down-cast; Toiling, weary. They shall enter a burning Fire; And will be made to drink from a boiling spring; They will have no food save that of dry, bitter and thorny herbage, Which will neither fatten, nor satisfy hunger. And some faces on that day will be joyful, Well pleased with their labour, In a lofty Garden, Wherein thou wilt hear no idle talk; Therein is a running spring, Therein are raised couches, And goblets properly placed, And cushions beautifully ranged, And carpets tastefully spread.

Do they not then look at the camel, how it is created? And at the heaven, how it is raised high? And at the mountains, how they are set up? And at the earth, how it is spread out? Admonish, therefore, for thou art but an admonisher; Thou hast no authority to compel them. But whoever turns away and disbelieves, Allah will punish him with the greatest punishment. Unto Us surely is their return, Then, surely, it is for Us to call them to account.

CH88 R1



Following the Forefathers

Like most people in the world, I inherited my faith from my parents. We are taught from childhood that the faith of our parents is the best. Our parents are our teachers, guides and the best at inculcating the idea in our minds that their faith is exceptional and all other faiths in the world are inferior. They expose us to books, magazines and other literature reinforcing their beliefs. So a great majority of us cling on to our faith more to honor our parents than out of conviction of its truthfulness.

The other night I was at a dinner party with my friends, and a person was saying how Islam is the only faith acceptable to God, and how it was so hard for him to conceive how the rest of mankind could be saved. I thought to myself that in a Christian family's home, someone was likely making the same assertion about Christianity, and that Jesus^{as} was the only savior. Our forefathers do an excellent job of passing on their faith to us.

Then there are some people of the opinion that all faiths are good. They all came from the same God and all have decent and solid principles of morality. It is best to respect each

faith and not to criticize them or discuss the differences among faiths. Life is simpler if we all just keep the faith passed down to us from our forefathers.

I never know what is in the minds of such people. Maybe they don't want to have a discussion because they feel insecure about their faith. Maybe they are afraid to discuss something new that may challenge them to accept some new principle of faith, thus going against the tradition of their forefathers. Maybe they really do want to just discuss the weather.

When we observe human nature, though, it is clear that people are invested with an inherent drive to make progress. Mankind is bent on making and promoting discoveries. We want to invent new toys, better machines, better communication systems and show them off to the world. Sure, part of it is to generate wealth, but it is primarily to prove that we, as humans, are capable of making new discoveries.

Our approach to faith should be the same. The faith we inherited is good, and its framework sufficient to manage our lives, but we must look for something better. In that process and quest for a better faith, we may discover that the one we already have is the best there is. On the other hand, if we find that there is another faith that has better values and principles, and that it could better our lives, then we must adopt it. Someone could manage their affairs using a telex machine, but life would be easier and more productive using email.

The Holy Qur'an has pointed out the tendency to rely blindly on inheritance – to the detriment of progress. It says that every time God sends a new message, the response of the people is always, "Nay, we will follow that wherein we found our fathers".²⁹ God responds with the question, "What! Even if their fathers had no sense at all and no guidance?"

My father was a writer, speaker and missionary of Islamic faith. I had access to books, magazines and newspapers that professed that Islam was better in many ways than Christianity. I asked myself the Holy Qur'an's question I mentioned above at age of 17. I signed up for a "correspondence course" to learn about Christianity. (This was before computers and the internet were invented. We didn't even have a VCR at the time. For the i-Pod generation, who don't know what a VCR is, I've made my point.) I received the Gospel of Matthew in the mail, with the instruction to fill out an enclosed questionnaire upon completing its reading. I would not be able to answer all of the questions unless I first read the entire Gospel. After I sent in my questionnaire, they sent me the Gospel of Mark, Luke, John and so on. I never told my father about it. I would ask him questions on issues that popped into my mind while I was reading the Gospels. I discovered on my own that my faith was indeed better and that I had not accepted it just because my father and his father passed it down to me.

I have no doubt that each religion has good principles to offer, but we ought to look for the best. We should not be the frog of the well, who thinks that the horizons of the earth end at the walls of the well. He has no clue that there are oceans out there.

The search for a better faith would no doubt widen our horizons. At the least it would continue the debates, the arguments and discussions among us about whose faith is more acceptable to God. Indeed the Holy Qur'an has encouraged such debate by posing a challenge to all human beings, saying, "Bring us your proofs."

Bring us your arguments if you think you have the truth. We could pass on a better faith to our children than

the one received from our forefathers. We have passed on a better world from the standpoint of scientific discovery. We could do the same in the spiritual arena as well. Or we could keep on following the faith of our forefathers, “even if they were ignorant.”

If nothing else, we wouldn’t have to discuss the weather at dinner parties.





O Ye man! Eat of what is lawful and good in the earth; and follow not the footsteps of Satan; surely, he is to you an open enemy. He only enjoins upon you what is evil and what is foul, and that you say of Allah what you do not know. And when it is said to them, 'Follow that which Allah has sent down,' they say: 'Nay, we will follow that wherein we found our fathers.' What! even if their fathers had no sense at all and no guidance?

CH2 R21



Birdbrains

I walked in the backyard across to the end of the yard to put some more food in the birdfeeder. As I got closer, birds flew out of the trees and the grass in a wonderful formation. I knew that they would all come back as soon as I walked back into my home. The food is always a good thing to gather around.

I'm not much of a bird watcher, and I can't tell you the difference between a yellow belly sapsucker and a regular run of the mill woodpecker. But, 'bird brains' have fascinated me for three reasons: They fly in formations that enable individual space, don't hoard any food and migrate when the food shortage and climate demands it.

Human beings like to hoard things. Without getting too sophisticated, I look in my closet and find that I have so many shirts and sweaters. If I did not buy a single more shirt or sweater, I could manage the rest of my life with what I have in the closet. So why do we keep on buying the shirts? It is because we like to hoard things. I have not mentioned what is in the garage or what people hoard in public storage places

which sometimes get auctioned off because they just leave it there. The ultimate hoarders in the history of mankind were, of course, the Pharaohs of Egypt. They hoarded their wealth even when they were dead. It took us over four thousand years to figure out what they were up to.

We like to amass and hoard wealth as well. The system of interest and gambling with the stock markets, especially in stock options and borrowing money on speculative ventures, are components of the process of trying to hoard wealth. Never mind that the wealth accumulated will have no utility for the person amassing it but will be passed down to someone else or the State in case he did not bother to write a will. What happens to that wealth and how it gets used is not in the control of the hoarder because he would be dead by then. He certainly is not going to let anyone touch it while he is alive. It is against the hoarder's code of life. It applies not just to individuals but to nations as well.

The thinking process of people gets affected by this phenomenon. Once you start on this track, the lust for hoarding grows even faster and a lifetime is consumed in it. Many people get hurt in the process, but that is of no consequence to the hoarder. His eyes are focused on one thing only. The birds don't hoard any food. Somehow, they know that their food will be provided. The only time they die of starvation is when we spill oil on the beach and they cannot fly anymore. They also don't fight over food but share. I have seen them stepping up to the birdfeeder one at a time and get their share.

I started thinking about the birds because the Holy Qur'an has mentioned that they are also communities like us.³⁰ So I figured it only needed a mention so we can possibly learn from them. It also says that God provides food for them. That is probably why they don't hoard any food. There is also

another thing that is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an for people who have hard times in their land. It says why don't they move around on this earth and see the bountiful land God has created.³¹ Birds definitely do it every winter when it gets too cold and the food is scarce.

People used to migrate when it was harsh weather and the food was scarce. It all changed when the colonial powers decided to take over the world. Before that time, anyone who wanted to move from one kingdom to another was welcome to do so. As long as they did not get involved in theft, murder or any other criminal activity, nobody bothered them. Since the colonial powers took over, we had passports, visas and customs agents to bribe.

Every year people from the mountains would start their journey in the fall to the lower lands looking for work and making a living while their land was getting ready to be under the snow. In the spring time, they would start their journey back to homeland where they were fine for the summer time. They provided services to the people and made a living and they were expected in the mainland areas every year. Communities, just like them, the birds spend their time in the warmer lands for the winter.

Even when the birds are in our area, they really don't need my food. It is not something that they depend on. When I forget to restock that birdfeeder, it does not matter because they still get fed. They know that I am not their provider. It is God who provides them their food. I am only an occasional carrier in a very minuscule way. We, on the other hand, have a hard time believing that there is a Provider for us.

The Holy Qur'an has stated it this way:

“And how many an animal there is that carries not its own sustenance! Allah provides for it and for you. And He is the All-Hearing, the All-knowing.”³²

My grandfather once told me that the human beings want to become Gods. He used the word *Rub* meaning the Sustainer. I said to him that I did not know anyone who claims to be God and I know some real weird birds. He said that people want to accumulate and leave behind so much wealth so their children would not need their Sustainer God. They don't understand that God Who provided for them would provide their children too. It made sense because the prophets of God do not leave anything behind as far as the worldly wealth is concerned.

The hoarders, of course, have a different mindset. The wealthiest person that I worked for in my financial management career believed only in cash. He did not buy any buildings, stocks or precious metals. He kept everything in cash and a whole lot of it. One day he asked me to see him because he needed my advice about something. His daughter was married to a Rabbi and had four children. They could not afford to have a big house on a Rabbi's salary. He wanted to discuss if he should give his daughter a down payment for a bigger house since the house they have is not sufficient for the four children. I suggested that he should give the money so they can be comfortable and especially since the money is going to be shared by her after he was gone. It is only advancing money from something that she is going to end up with anyway. I did not say it to him but I knew that the down payment involved would not make a dent in his monthly interest income.

A few weeks went by and I just stopped by his office and asked if his daughter got a new house. I was shocked when

he said that he decided not to give her the money. I had to ask why. He said that another one of his advisors, an attorney whom I know to be a hoarder as well, said something that changed his mind. I said please tell me what that profound statement was. He said, "Why do you want to take the pleasure away from them by not letting them make it on their own?"

It appealed to him so much that he decided to let his daughter chase around the four kids in a small house while her husband was trying to get his thoughts together for the Friday night sermon. I did not know what to say. All I could do was slap my forehead and say, "Oy vey!"

This thinking is so strange but it satisfies a hoarder because he gets to amass and hoard for a longer time especially considering that he was in his late seventies at the time. I wondered why he paid for the college tuition of his three sons and took the pleasure away from them by not letting them make it on their own?

Here is another interesting point to note. Islam promotes charity and helping the poor, needy, the orphans and the widows. It all depends on one's income and capacity and there is no fixed amount prescribed. The only required charity with a fixed rate is *Zakat* and it does not have anything to do with the income of an individual. It only applies to the wealth not in use for a year. This is how Islam discourages hoarding of wealth and tries to reduce it over a period of time.

We could definitely learn something from the birds. They do not hoard their food and yet do not starve. They migrate when they find conditions unbearable and collect the bounties of God on this widely spread out earth. They sing and enjoy the time on this earth and give each other their space without harming one another.

I don't know who coined the term birdbrain, but we could certainly use more of them in the human race. Unfortunately, the context we typically use the term doesn't give credit to how intelligent those little creatures are. I continue feeding them so I can watch their flight formations in my backyard. It's a small price to pay for the enlightening scenery that follows.





O ye who believe! avoid most of suspicions; for suspicion in some cases is a sin. And spy not, nor back-bite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his brother who is dead? Certainly you would loathe it. And fear Allah, surely, Allah is Oft-Returning with compassion and is Merciful.

O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female; and We have made you into tribes and sub-tribes that you may recognize one another. Verily, the most honourable among you, in the sight of Allah, is he who is the most righteous among you.

Surely, Allah is All-knowing, All-Aware.

CH49 R2



11-21 →
WALL ST

Wall Street Casino

The protesters occupied the Wall Street for about a couple of months. It was an unprecedented demonstration against the bankers and the stock market on Wall Street which represent the core of United States economy.

I am not in favor of demonstrations of any kind. They are justified through the arguments of non-violence, peaceful retaliation and freedom of expression. Even when the intentions are peaceful, they rarely stay peaceful and bring about several problems for the general public. The level of noise for the neighboring residents, increased burden on the police force and garbage accumulation are just a few items for starters. The public ends up paying all these costs in one way or another. There are commandments about caring for your neighbor, cleanliness and obeying the authority; but they become irrelevant in a demonstration.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} said that he was given commandments about caring for the neighbor so much that he thought one day he would get the commandment making the neighbor an heir.^M He also said that cleanliness is half of the

faith. The Holy Qur'an has clearly stated that you must obey the authority and the law of the land.

I must admit though, that when a public demonstration continues and has a certain sustained power, we must acknowledge a problem that demands resolution. It is also an indication that our legal and civil system have failed to address the concerns of its citizens. It can be assumed that there are many more people who have the same feelings about these issues as the demonstrators. Everyone does not have the strength to stand on the streets with posters, knowing that things could get out of hand and they could be arrested. Standing amidst piles of garbage is another deterrent.

I don't claim to be a Wall Street guru of any kind, but I started to think about its issues that the demonstrators have set out to fix.

The stock market was intended to raise capital for businesses, particularly corporations. People bought shares in companies in hopes their earnings would grow to increase the value of their shares over time. Today, investors buy shares to sell them for a profit on a short term basis, even overnight and intraday. The thought process is not whether a company is a viable business or not, but how effectively a marketing campaign could stir up investor perception. The buying or selling decision is made based on what the other investor would value the shares tomorrow or in the next week or next month. Manipulation of values driven by special interest groups (e.g., the oil industry) with massive monetary muscle used to influence decision makers and market perception, that needs to be controlled, is all related to the short term investment thinking. The speculative frenzy is as close to a gambling casino as you are going to get.

The house must win in a casino or they would not stay in business for long. The stock brokers must win in order to stay in business. Whether the stock goes up or down when a sale takes place, they must get their commissions. Whether you are buying or selling, the stock broker must get their commissions. It is in the best interest of the stock brokers to have a high volume of transactions so they want the investors to keep buying or selling. As long as the machines on the casino floor keep ringing, the house is happy.

How can we fix this huge house of transactions? I have some ideas but I know they are not going to be accepted by the Congress and especially by the stock brokers. How about if we make a law that stock cannot be sold for at least three years after the day it is bought? That would assure that the investor is buying the shares because he truly believes that the business entity is a viable business and will be around for a long time and will bring good returns in at least three years. Their decision would not be based on how they can make a killing by other investors trying to buy the same shares in a few days because everyone else is buying them. The businesses would know that they would have to have a viable business plan to convince the investors for long term investing. Investor hype would not be required when introducing a new corporation.

We could enforce this through the tax system as we normally do to change the behavior of taxpayers. If someone sells the stock before three years, the loss cannot be deducted and the gain would be taxed at eighty percent tax rate. When the stock is held and sold after three years, there would be a capital gain tax of only five percent.

As I stated above, I know neither Congress nor the Wall Street gurus would be in its favor. I think it can still work though. Maybe I can convince a few of my investor friends

to work on this plan of investing, for the long term. Then they could convince a few of their investor friends to do the same. Maybe it will catch on and Wall Street would become a place for raising capital for viable businesses poised for long term growth. It will save a lot of agony for a lot of people participating in demonstrations.

Wall Street is too big and there is so much money involved that there is no simple solution and I certainly don't claim to have the solutions. If nothing else, it is food for thought for the serious minded people to use it as a basis for further discussion. My proposal is not a comprehensive solution to all the ills of Wall Street, but it could be a good first baby step. Or we can continue to use Wall Street as a super-sized casino and demonstrate on the streets and pile up the garbage.

Since I am sure about the fate of my proposal, I know the garbage hauling business is here to stay and has tremendous long term future growth possibilities. I think I should buy stock of the garbage hauling companies, for long term investment of course. As long as Wall Street keeps operating the way it is, the stock has got to grow along with the garbage.

Some deals are just too good to pass.





O ye who believe! wine and the game of hazard and idols and divining arrows are only an abomination of Satan's handiwork. So shun each one of them that you may prosper. Satan desires only to create enmity and hatred among you by means of wine and the game of hazard, and to keep you back from the remembrance of Allah and from Prayer. But will you keep back?

CH5 R12



End of the World? Well, Maaaybeee

Predictions about the end of the world have been around since the beginning of time, and in honor of that noble tradition, we are now confronted with the prediction that the world will end in 2012. I hope this article is not too late!

This time around, the gurus are using the Mayan calendar to support their beliefs. I have never understood why anyone would want their day of glory by predicting the end of the world. If they were to ever get it right, they wouldn't exactly have much time to celebrate. They'd be dead just like everybody else. On the flipside, if they didn't get it right, they'd join the long list of humiliated people who either messed up on their math, or were forced to admit they didn't have a clue. So, what's the point?

Some self-proclaimed prophets who predicted the end of the world forced it upon themselves in unfortunate and pitiful endings. Some became the laughing stock, whereas some committed suicide along with their sincere, but blind followers.

Adding to the tragedy was the inclusion of the innocent lives of children.

We really don't learn from history.

I'm also at a loss when it comes to lost nations such as the Mayans. They could not predict their own end. If they could and then they did, why wouldn't they have moved? I'm not a history buff so I don't know how or why they disappeared.

One thing I can say for sure is that if I knew of an up and coming catastrophe like an earthquake or a flood, I'm headin' out of town. Maybe they didn't believe in their own predictions and left it up to the people of the 21st century to glorify them. Once again, if the world is really going to end soon, it doesn't matter who predicted it because their day of glory will be their day of destruction.

As if we didn't want the luxury of waiting for that fateful day, nations have eagerly sought the development of weapons of mass destruction. With the advancement of human evolution of thought has come the most creative ways of destruction. We invent new and improved ammunition, bigger bombs and all kinds of secretive weapons to oppress others. It's technological terrorism where might is right. Be our friend or we'll blow your head off...and we'll make it as easy as playing an arcade game. What a way to win the hearts!

America has so much to offer to the world when it comes to technology and invention of products to help mankind. Instead of impressing others with the dream of life-giving innovations, we sell bombs, missiles and chemical weapons to dictators who we later declare as our enemies. In the process of becoming a country capable of destroying the world many times over, we have prepared others to have the

same capabilities. It begs the question whether nations bond with us in friendship or fear! In Islam we were forewarned about the AntiChrist, or *Masih ad-Dajjal*, who would harness such tactics.

Complementing these are Latter Day prophecies about wars and famines in the Bible, the Holy Qur'an and other scriptures. The prophecies in the Holy Qur'an are not to scare us to death, but to prompt a spiritual reformation. Every one of the prophecies is conditional. Every incendiary warning issues a fragrance of hope - a way out.

We could avoid all that despicable and fearful destruction by changing our behavior for the better and develop a relationship with God. Unfortunately, history tells us these prophecies fell upon deaf ears. Sodom and Gomorrah are one example of many. The only wise people I can give credit to for taking advantage of this opportunity were the people of Nineveh, the nation of Prophet Jonah^{as}. They changed their behavior and it was wonderful that the promise of God came true.

Prophet Jonah^{as} was really sure that the destruction was going to come especially when he had to spend three days in the belly of the whale. When he came out and discovered that his enemies were still around, he realized the end of the world did not happen. He even complained to God. He found out that those enemies were his followers and friends living a new and improved righteous lifestyle, the way God wanted them to. Now that is a day of glory we need to work towards and one I can relate to.

It is not that important when the world is going to end. It is much more important what we can do to better our behavior. So even if the end were to come, we'd be much better

off.

If you asked me personally, I think the world is going to end the day I die. I wouldn't have to worry about the politicians pushing bombs to keep the weapons industry alive. I would not have to deal with trying to get along with problematic people. I would not be worried about the mortgage, the insurance, 401k performance, and the rising cost of college. Hallelujah!! I would be done with all this.

What the new world will hold I could not tell you. God has kept that to Himself. It must be better than this world. It would be the end of the world for me but the rest of the world would still go on as it has for the last so many millions of years. Here is the amusing part: I don't even know when my end is going to come - so much for my trying to predict the end of the world for everybody else.

We should take note of the Ninevites when we hear the predictions of destruction and the end of the world. Odds are, we won't and it'll be a shame.





See they not how Allah originates creation, then repeats it? That surely is easy for Allah. Ay, ‘Travel in the earth, and see how He originated the creation. Then will Allah provide the latter creation.’ Surely, Allah has power over all things. He punishes whom He pleases and shows mercy unto whom He pleases; and to Him will you be turned back. And you cannot frustrate the designs of Allah in the earth nor in the heaven; nor have you any friend or helper beside Allah.

CH29 R2



The News Media Wrestlers

On every Saturday, I used to watch the wrestling matches on TV. In those days, Dick the Bruiser and Jimmy the Valiant were the main rivals. It was amazing how one would be beaten up so bad but then he would get up and beat up his opponent. I had suspicious feelings that it cannot be true. But this was live on television with real people and a real crowd. Like most people I pretended to believe it. We all wanted the good guys to win but the producers made sure that we keep our excitement level high and not let them win all the time. It was all good entertainment.

Some years later some scrooge decided to take the wrestling issue to the courts. They proved that it was not “Sports” but “Entertainment”. Therefore, they should not advertise it as a sports event. The court agreed and my deep down suspicions proved true. By this time I had matured and it did not bother me that much. I am not sure what happened to the feelings of the young viewers and fans of the wrestling heroes. It was still entertainment for many but I am sure the lawyers came out ahead on the deal. It is always a dollar game.

In those good old days, we used to watch the news at 5:30 PM on CBS with Walter Cronkite. He gave us the news the way it was. As a matter of fact, he finished his news with the sentence: "And that's the way it is on" and he mentioned the date. His delivery of news was professional and most of the time without emotions and his personal biases. I am sure he had his personal feelings about the war in Vietnam which was at its height. But he never showed those feeling in his delivery of the news. We made our own analysis and judgment about the events in the world and the USA. He is still regarded as one of the best and in views of many an icon in TV news.

Since then, TV news programs have changed. The most favorite channel Fox News delivers the news with obvious biases. The anchorpersons give us their analysis and show their emotions. Nothing seems to matter to them. They would misquote the politicians, take excerpts out of context and in some cases even make up the news. This is so bad now that even the self-proclaimed "Fake News program" on comedy central, The Daily Show, exposes these facts. It is all entertainment and the dollar game.

All that matters to the TV anchor persons these days is the ratings. That translates into dollars for their bosses, the shareholders and most of all for themselves. It is of no concern to them how they misdirect the public view about issues that have a great influence in their lives. Misinformation is so great that the Fox viewers are now considered by some to be the most ignorant. Just as a clue most of them still believe that President of USA Mr. Obama is not a USA born citizen and therefore did not qualify to run for his position. The emotions of sincere conservative citizens are played with in such a way that it is truly a shame.

There is another group that has come to the surface as

“specialists”, “consultants” and “experts” about Islam. As long as someone can pronounce a few Arabic names and terms, he is perceived to be an “expert” on the religion of Islam. The so called “TV News” stations bring these people on and explain verses of the Holy Qur’an. While it is entertainment but unfortunately it is doing a lot of damage in the world. It provides ammunition to the extremists in Muslim countries against the West and in particular the Western News Media for spreading baseless claims about the faith of Islam. It makes Muslims look at the tube awestruck with what is being presented what their religion is supposed to be. It is all news to them. Meanwhile the news channel is minting the money.

Most of these experts and scholars have their issues that they are trying to blame on Islam. They may have come from countries where they were subject to atrocities or ill behavior as a result of their own cultures that they were brought up in. They may have suffered because of the political rivalries in the country they came from. It is all too easy to blame the religion of Islam because who is going to refute their testimony. The response would be too sober and too bland to make it on the entertainment news channels.

A friend of mine sincerely wants to get together a few people who take the Fox News to court and prove that it is not a “News” channel but strictly an “Entertainment” one. I don’t know how and when he would be successful in doing it. I am certainly not joining that group. Who wants to deal with the lawyers for two years or more in this fight? That is no entertainment.

It all comes down to the fact that the dollars are dictating the behavior of most of these individuals. The best interest of the general public, morality and simple rules of decency are all sacrificed in this process. Truth is manipulated

in such a manner that it all seems real. After all it is live on television. Just like when Dick the Bruiser would get up from the floor shaking his whole body and beat the dickens out of Jimmy the Valiant.

We are taught by the Holy Qur'an to use the "straight talk"³³ which is different than just plain truth. We are told that we should say the words which would communicate the correct message and just not be technically "truth". We are in a society where it is the job of the speech writers and lawyers to write things in a way that can be manipulated in different ways later. The words are carefully chosen so the politicians can talk their way out of things once they see the tide changing. In one case, the President of USA even questioned the definition of the word "is".

I am not sure what would change the behavior of the TV anchor persons to get away from entertainment and truly report the news as Walter did? It is hard to fight the dollar game they are in. Maybe we can get the Wrestling Federation to take the Fox News to court. They lost their battle last time but this could be their way of getting back at some one. No different than Dick the bruiser getting up and beating up someone else after he was about to croak.

Now that would be entertainment.





And on the day when He will gather them all together, He will say, ‘O company of Jinn! you sought to make subservient to yourselves a great many from among men!’ And their friends from among men will say, ‘Our Lord! we profited from one another but now we have reached our term which Thou didst appoint for us.’ He will say, ‘The Fire is your abode, wherein you shall abide, save what Allah may will.’ Surely, thy Lord is Wise, All-Knowing.

CH6 R15



Reaching out to the Elders

A few years ago, I went to visit my ancestral village in northwestern India for the first time. I did not know anything about the place except that there was a humongous tree in the center of the village. My grandfather and his contemporaries used to sit under the shade of the tree; it was a gathering place for the village residents. I was not even sure of the tree would still be there. The guide took us there and lo and behold the tree was there and there were people sitting under the shade talking to each other.

I have no clue as to what the people would have talked about under that tree over 80 years ago. I imagined they talked about the fields and the weather and the good old time stories. Maybe they talked about the mysteries of life and what was going on in each one's family. Since they met every day, it could not have been a long conversation. Maybe they just gathered there to admire nature and hear the leaves clapping in the afternoon breeze. One thing would have been noticeable though; the young people would also sit there and listen to their elders talk. Lack of Radio, TV, Internet, iPods and Wii did not give them many choices. That was a good thing.

Although most of the elderly gentlemen under the tree were not formally educated, they had experiences of a lifetime. They had acquired knowledge by studying nature and learning from their lifetime experience of good times and bad times. This was the venue for them to pass all they had learned and experienced to the next generation. Of course, it was up to the young how they utilized the wisdom bestowed upon them.

When I go to dinner parties or other get-together occasions nowadays, I see a different picture. It does not take much time before the young folks start to remove away from the old folks. In a few minutes the old folks and the young folks are separated in their own groups and it is visible. The old folks talk about their homeland and the political strife and joke around in their native mother tongue. The young folks talk about the latest in the electronic inventions and Apps they can add to their iPhones and I am sure things they don't want their old folks to know. It is a good thing the old folks don't know what they talk about.

I know from my own experiences that I learned a lot from the elders of our times because I sat with them along with other young people of my age. Practical solutions and advice we received from those gatherings were the guiding lights throughout our lives. Young people of today are missing out on that. There is no substitute for the wisdom and guidance from an elder whose intention is just to pass the essence of life to the next generation. They have no ulterior motive or selfish reasoning to misguide the next generation. They want the next generation to do better.

I was involved in appearing in front of a county board in reference to the approval process of zoning change for a mosque project. Most of the members of the board were elderly

gentlemen. Once the meeting was over, one of the board members approached me and said that I should not worry about it because the approval will be granted. Then he stated that in his opinion if everyone lived up to be 150 years of age, the world would be much better off because the older you get you do not want to hurt anyone.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} said: If a young man honors an older person on account of his age, Allah appoints someone to show reverence to him in his old age.^N Holy Qur'an has emphasized the importance of being in the company of righteous people. Prophets have tried to get their disciples to spend as much time as possible with them. It was through their constant companionship and listening to the wisdom and advice in person that changed their outlook on life. That is how new heaven and new earth is created. Reading a book on a particular subject or to Google a topic cannot and will not do the trick. We don't even know who pasted the material on the Internet that we see and proceed to quote all over the place.

The tree that I saw in our village reminded me how the tradition of people getting together after a hard day's work and exchanging ideas and experiences is still in full force with young people learning from the elder generation. We don't have those trees in the big cities we live in but we have our elders to learn from. Human history shows that one generation learned from the previous one and passed on a better and advanced philosophy and technology to the next. Let us not waste the opportunity to learn what it takes a lifetime to master.

Reach out to your elders, especially the righteous ones. I know it is hard to laugh at the jokes of the elders especially when they are in Punjabi or Pushto. You have got to pay the price for everything. Believe me; it would be worth your while in the long run.

On the brighter side it would give you a break from the hectic fingers wrestling with your iPhone or whatever gadgets you like to play with. You have a lifetime to play with these gadgets but your elders may not be around for long.





Thy Lord has commanded, “Worship none but Him, and show kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age with thee, never say unto them any word expressive of disgust nor reproach them, but address them with excellent speech. “And lower to them the wing of humility out of tenderness. And say, ‘My Lord, have mercy on them even as they nourished me in my childhood.”

CH17 R3



Ocean of Love

The man was in distress. Doctors had given him three months to live. He was getting hopeless and did not know what to do, or how to escape the depression that he would soon depart from this world.

He decided to go to the main mosque to see if he could get some help in asking God to extend his life. He was sure of one thing: all life is in the Hands of God.

It was the time of morning prayers on this spring day. He joined the congregation and performed his prayers. Once it was over, he saw the Imam walking towards the outside door. The man got up, caught up to the walking Imam and handed him a small note. The note just described in a few words that he was in distress and did not have long to live and needed prayers. The Imam took a look at the note for a few seconds and turned back. He went to the podium and made an announcement. He told the congregation that they have a brother who is in distress and needs our prayers so we will pray for him. The Imam raised his hands and so did the whole congregation and everyone started to pray silently. The man in distress also prayed along

with the congregation, for his life.

The man relates that as he started to pray for himself, a feeling of comfort and contentment were going through his whole body as if the prayers were being accepted. This feeling he had not experienced before. He was getting the feeling that his distress was over. God had accepted his prayers and he would be fine. He was all done praying for himself but the Imam was still praying along with the congregation. Of course, the congregation was not going to be done until the Imam would say "Amen."

The man in distress started to watch the Imam and started to wonder why he was still praying. He did not know this Imam personally. The man was also confident of the fact that it is very hard for someone to pray for another especially when no relationship exists between the two. He was fully knowledgeable about the principle that if you want someone else to pray compassionately for you, you need to establish a relationship and a connection in order to have true affectionate feelings resulting in prayers from the heart. He never had an audience with this Imam or conversed with him. He was even sure that the Imam did not even know his name or where he came from. Thoughts started to pound in his mind. What kind of man is this Imam? How can he have the compassion, love, and mercy for someone he does not even know? What could he be still praying for and in what words? Is he trying his best to make sure that this prayer does not go unanswered by God? The man says more time passed and he was tired by then but the Imam was still praying for him standing at the podium.

The man started to wonder about the Imam and such feelings of affection and compassion arose in his heart that he started to pray for the Imam. He was done praying for himself anyway. He started to pray that this Imam be blessed by God

even more. He prayed that God elevate the spiritual status of this revered person. He prayed that the spiritual status and the standard of compassion and affection for others be continued even in his progeny. He asked God to bestow everything upon this Imam.

Finally, the Imam said Amen and the prayers were finished. The man in distress was relieved and had the assurance that prayers on his behalf had been accepted. He was sure of that.

The man in distress expressed and related this story seven years later so it is certain that he lived seven years beyond the three months doctors gave him to live. According to his own statement he was not even taking any medical treatment anymore. I do not know this man personally and I am not sure how long he lived. I know about this story because the Imam was my father and the man published the story in a magazine after my father passed away.

It was a wonderful spring morning when this congregation prayed for a man they did not know as the sunlight was beginning to spread. Their love was real and full of sincere affection for their fellow human being. This is just one drop from the ocean of love that God holds for His creation. These miracles of prayers happen all over the world and have continued to happen since the creation of time.

It is remarkable to me that God would have such tremendous love for His creation. Even more remarkable is that He created love and mercy for human beings to interact with each other. The most remarkable is the fact that God made us conscious of this fact. We know and feel and are fully conscious of the fact that we can care for each other, have mercy and love for each other.

The love of God descends on earth especially when He sees us showing affection, love and mercy for each other because it is a small reflection of His love for us. When our Father in Heaven sees His children showing true love and mercy, it pleases Him and miracles take place.

Claims of love for God without the display of compassion and love for His children are meaningless.

We can experience the same as it happened on that spring day in 1961. The congregation, the Imam and a man in distress prayed for each other with such feelings and compassion that it received the acceptance of God. A man's life was extended that day...and we got another reassuring story, another drink from God's ocean of love.

Glory be to the Lord!





And when My servants ask thee about Me, say: 'I am near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he prays to Me. So they should hearken to Me and believe in Me, that they may follow the right way.'

CH2 R23



The Age of MIS-Information

We are living in the age of Internet, an unprecedented creation of human beings in which the whole world is a player. We have Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and various other social media which are being used by over a billion people around the globe. Information gets transmitted throughout the world instantaneously, but so does miss-information.

Information pasted, typed and uploaded by over a billion people 24-7 on the internet is used through Google search and various other engines. What are the qualifications of these writers and what is their character like? We don't even know whether they are righteous or evil. What are their agendas and intentions in disseminating particular messages and information? We may not even know their real names and locations but every day we quote and rely on the information because 'we saw it on the internet'.

Some time ago, there was a story about a woman who sued McDonald's because she claimed their coffee was too hot. Internet had a blast with that story and so did the late night

comedians. Everyone was discussing the story. TV comedy show Seinfeld even based a whole episode on it.

I did my own survey on this story among my friends to see how accurate their information was about this well publicized, extensively talked about story. I asked them how old the lady who sued McDonald's was. Was she driving at the time she spilled coffee on herself? How seriously was she burnt, 1st degree, 2nd degree or 3rd degree? What was the settlement amount in this case? Don't need the exact amount, a million, less than a million or more than a million?

You would expect that in a well talked about story, my friends would know this basic information. I was appalled at the answers I got, mostly inaccurate. What about the stories of importance about security and of national importance? How are we supposed to make sure that we are getting accurate information? That scared me.

My attention was drawn to a verse in the Holy Qur'an in which it provides us guidance about spreading news.

"When there comes to them a matter of security or of fear they publish it widely. Whereas if they were to refer it to the Prophet and to those in authority among them, those of them whose business it is to investigate would ascertain the truth of that matter. Was it not for the Grace of God upon you, and His Mercy, you would certainly have gone astray, except a few."³⁴

This commandment is given to us about spreading gossip and untrustworthy news. More importantly, it is referring to matters concerning national importance of security and matters that may spread fear and anxiety among the public. God has told us that it is not for everyone to investigate but it is

vested in people in authority. Any matter of importance should be referred to them so after investigation, they can publicize it to the citizens. Irresponsible or false news are covered by this verse also; even if it is a harmless story of a woman and hot coffee. At the least it would save us from wasting so much of our time on unverified and unsubstantiated facts.

By now, some of you probably have already Googled in trying to find out the answers to the questions in my informal survey. However, I will still go ahead and give you the answers.

The lady was in her 70's and her grandson was driving her around. He decided to stop at McDonald's and asked her if she wanted something. She asked for a cup of coffee so he brought her one while she was in the car in the parking lot. While they were parked, she proceeded to add sugar and cream. While she was opening the lid, the coffee spilled in her lap and she got burnt; not 1st, not 2nd but 3rd degree burns and was in severe pain. Her grandson took her straight to the hospital from where she was sent to the burn center.

All she wanted from McDonald's was the medical costs but they refused. She could not afford to pay the amount. I am sure they did not want to set a precedent. There could be a whole lot of people lined up to sue them.

It was discovered by the attorneys that most restaurants serve coffee between 160°F and 170°F. McDonald's was serving coffee between 180°F and 190°F so it would stay fresh longer, a corporate policy to increase profits. Just FYI, the boiling point of water is 212°F. They lost the case and appealed. Eventually the case was settled.

How much did she receive? If you guessed at any amount, it is just a guess because the amount of settlement

was secret under the court order. Professionals in this field estimated based on their experience in such cases that it would have been between 400 to 600 thousand dollars.

Just compare the real facts to the general public's impression of a woman trying to get rich by suing McDonald's.

Internet is a great creation of human minds. It can be and is a wonderful tool in communications and transfer of knowledge across the globe. Let us use it responsibly to get the best of it. Let us not waste this remarkable media for irresponsible gossip and idle talk.

God also says in the Holy Qur'an that there will be no idle talk in the Heaven.³⁵

It is up to us to make our world a Heaven by following the commandments and guidance of God given to us through His Mercy.

Spreading this message would be beneficial to everyone on the globe, through the Internet, of course.





O ye who believe! be strict in observing justice, and be witnesses for Allah, even though it be against yourselves or against parents and kindred. Whether he be rich or poor, Allah is more regardful of them both than you are. Therefore follow not low desires so that you may be able to act equitably. And if you conceal the truth or evade it, then remember that Allah is well aware of what you do.

CH4 R20



Pride of Success

I hate golf. I tried it a few times, but I'd be lyin' if I said it wasn't painful. But the buffet at the club...now we're talking. I have to confess...I simply don't have the patience for the game, and the accountant in me keeps telling me that the benefit-effort ratio just ain't worth it. So after contemplating over what appeared to be countless hours of wasted time on the course, I came to the conclusion that men play golf just to get away from their wives. Women play it so they can keep their eyes on their husbands or just to get even.

My golf game is more like playing field hockey without the excitement. The joy of hitting a tiny ball into a hole, and the exercise of getting in and out of the bump-cart doesn't justify the time and expense associated with this game. Even when I play golf, I don't keep score. I tell my fellow golfers that I play for fun and not for winning or losing, but then again, who am I kidding? They know and I know why I don't. Besides, why increase blood pressure by keeping score? It kind of goes against the idea of healthier living through playing a sport. I hit a birdie once. I was more surprised than anyone else on the green.

The story goes that a man was playing golf with his priest. They both did okay on the thoroughfare. When they got to the green, the priest kneeled down and prayed. The green is where you lose most of the points. He got up and with his putter took a shot. It went in the hole like it had eyes. The priest exulted with pride. His friend asked him, "Father! Would that work for me?"

The priest said, "No."

His friend asked, "Why not?"

The priest replied, "Because you're not as good a putter as I am."

It is ironic when people pray for something and their prayer is answered, they turn around and credit it to themselves. They start to believe that the success they achieved was because of their own intelligence, effort, hard work and talent. That is, until the next time they need to pray. On the other hand, believe me; I have seen some extraordinary business success stories by some...hmm...shall we say "not too sharp" individuals. There was something beyond their success.

There was this man who went to his high school reunion. He was appalled to learn that the guy who graduated at the bottom of the class was exceptionally successful. So he asked him how he did it. The guy told him that he has a very simple business model. He sells only one item which is a small metal ring that is used in all the cars. He buys it for one cent each and sells it for four cents. He further explained, "You just can't beat the 25% markup, it gives me a good profit."

The Holy Qur'an comments upon people's behavior in the following verse:

"And when trouble touches man, he cries unto Us. But

when We bestow on him a favor from Us, he says, ‘This has been given to me on account of *my own* knowledge.’ Nay, it is only a trial; but most of them know not”.³⁶

I have seen many business people pray for their success. God bestows on them exceptional results. It does not take any time for them to boast to their associates how they achieved the good results. How hard they worked and that “luck” had something to do with it but not that much. Amazingly, they try to avoid the word “God.” That is precisely what God has talked about in the above verse.

Throughout the Holy Qur’an, God has told us that the award of wealth to human beings is a trial and a test. It is one way to judge the people how they behave when they become affluent. It is a tough trial. As a matter of fact, the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} has explained that the trial of wealth is much tougher than the trial of poverty.

Rich men have options. How they spend their money reflects their character and their spiritual status. God has guided us how to handle our money. The IRS does not care how and what we spend our money on as long as we pay our taxes, but God cares. He explains to us what we should spend our money on and what we should not spend on. We are to share our wealth with poor, needy, widows, orphans, travelers and our family and relatives. They may not be as needy of receiving our money, as we are in need of giving it to them in exchange for the blessings of God. We are not to waste our money on gambling, alcohol and other prohibited foods and activities. The poor may not have all these options. Most of their money is exhausted on basic necessities, and their obligations to God are limited. The rich have so many opportunities to slip and incur the displeasure of God.

Just the notion that one's success did not result from prayers is an indication of arrogance and pride. In business, there are numerous factors affecting the results. The competition, customers, employees, technology, governmental regulations, seasonal factors and a number of other unforeseen influences can impact results in either direction. A person's ego has to be huge, not to mention delusional, to really believe that he had all those factors in control and became successful all on his own.

To be fair to the priest, however, I must say that he had a point also. Holy Qur'an also states that man reaps what he sows. Effort and hard work is a requirement and goes hand in hand with prayers. You just can't pray to God and hop into the cockpit of a Boeing 777 plane. You need to take lessons, practice and book a ton of flight hours before your prayers can be heard. Who knows? Maybe his friend didn't care to invest enough in himself, and truly was a lousy putter. On the brighter side, he's always welcome to hang out with me at the buffet.

Thanking God for whatever we achieve is the sure way to further our success. Passing our tests and trials is the key. Success is a tough road. So many follow the footsteps of Pharaoh, and overlook the path Moses^{as} trod. That is why the Bible and the Holy Qur'an caution that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.





And when trouble befalls a man, he calls on Us, lying on his side, or sitting, or standing; but when We have removed his trouble from him, he goes his way as though he had never called on Us for the removal of the trouble that befell him. Thus it is that the doings of the extravagant are given a fair appearance in their eyes.

CH10 R2



Prayer Legislation

The country has been debating over the prayer in schools and in public offices for a long time. This time it is the Town of Greece, NY who has brought the case all the way to the Supreme Court. The Court is to decide if it is acceptable and legal for the town of Greece to start their sessions with a prayer. As of now, the Court is divided and it is not going to be an easy case. It is noteworthy that each session of the Supreme Court opens with the usual “God save the United States and this honorable court.”

Supreme Court Justices are already fighting over the issue and everyone agrees that they may not have a solution. The arguments are going to be expanded far beyond what the Town of Greece is pleading. Their basic argument in continuing their practice of prayer is that “we have done it all along since the town was established”. Well, that is not going to cut the mustard.

The prayer has three components to it. One is to whom it is being addressed, the second is for whom it is being said and finally what is being asked. I don’t think anyone has any

problem with the last two components. It is the first one that gives rise to all sorts of commotion.

Let us look at a simple prayer.

“Lord, give us prosperity and health. Our God, we pray that you protect us from our enemies and shower your blessings on us. We ask that You forgive us our sins and make us do righteous acts.”

I don't think any Christian, Jew or Muslim has any problem with this prayer. Atheists have problem with any prayer. I am not sure what they want as a replacement for a prayer, maybe nothing.

Here is where the problem comes in. You add the words at the end of the above prayer, “In the name of Jesus, your son we ask that you accept our prayer,” Or we add the words, “O Allah, hear our prayer,” and all bets are off. Muslims and Jews have a problem with the first one and the Christians and Jews don't want the second one. It is just these additions that make an otherwise simple, good prayer into a lawsuit or we fight over school prayer like children. Other than the ego issues, it is understandable since no one wants to be a hypocrite as that has even deeper connotations in the religious arena.

Our problem has not been the prayer in schools or in public offices. Our problem has to do with the identification of the Deity we are addressing it to. If we can somehow agree upon a common Deity, the prayer problem would disappear and we wouldn't care where it was recited, at a school, city hall or the Supreme Court.

The Holy Qur'an addressed this issue fourteen hundred years ago. It says, “Say, ‘O People of the Book! come to a word

equal between us and you — that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partner with Him, and that some of us take not others for Lords beside Allah.’ But if they turn away, then say, ‘Bear witness that we have submitted *to God*.’”³⁷

The argument is simple; let us discuss the definition of the Deity and the rest will just fall in place. This discussion does not belong in the Supreme Court or the Legislative bodies but among the clergy. That is what we have tried our best to curtail.

The discussion needs to take place publicly if we agree on the concept of God who is the Creator, the Sustainer of the worlds and how do we accept Jesus^{as} as His son. Muslims don’t have any problem is accepting him as God’s son just as Prophet David^{as} has been called the son of God and prophet Jacob^{as} who is even called the first-born and even named by God as Israel. First born among the Israelites was considered in place of the father when he went out of town.

You see according to even the New Testament, there are only two kinds of people on this earth, the sons of God and the sons of Satan. Jesus^{as} definitely was on God’s side. Jews have a problem with this scenario since Jesus^{as} is not acceptable to them. But the Father in Heaven or Allah is also the Lord of Israel and again that is the common ground we need to establish. Unless we come to this common ground, as the Holy Qur’an has suggested, there is no other solution to this debate. We will continue to debate and sue each other and waste our time in superficial arguments just to keep the lawyers employed.

Let us pray that the Supreme Court decides with wisdom and comes up with something that keeps the lawyers away for a while. Of course, we can say this prayer privately, unless and until we can agree on a common Deity.

Lord help us!



Worship Gestures

Jesus^{as} son of Mary was hiding in the garden of Gethsemane. Warrants for his arrest had been issued and the Roman soldiers were looking for him everywhere. He was worried for his life since Romans were known to be vicious and it was likely that they would sentence him to death. This was the time for him to pray earnestly to God to save his life. This is when, according to the New Testament, he put his forehead on the ground and asked for this cup of death to be removed.

I was trying to imagine how many different ways one could put his forehead on the ground and be able to pray in a dignified manner. Lying flat on the belly or trying to keep your knees from touching the ground would not work. The only possible way is how the Muslims pray; knees on the ground and prostrate with your forehead on the ground and pray. This may be unacceptable to Christians since they don't pray that way, but that is the posture Jesus^{as} son of Mary used in his time of desperate need.

Body gestures while praying vary from religion to religion. Some sit on chairs and some sit on the floor, some

bow and some just stand and sing hymns. Islam has its own way of worship which is unique from any other faith.

In order to understand the gestures of worship, we need to appreciate the body language used in various cultures and countries. The Japanese bow to show respect to others. Persian kings had their courtiers sit in front of them on the floor with their legs folded. Hindus touch their forehead on the feet of their idols in the temple. In some countries touching your ears is a symbol of asking forgiveness or admission of guilt. Americans fold their hands in front when showing respect. The middle-Easterners prostrate in front of their kings and deities; that is probably why Jesus^{as} put his forehead on the ground.

That just about covers all the cultural mannerisms on our planet, give or take a bend.

In Islam, with the wisdom of our Holy prophet Muhammad^{saw}, the gestures for worship have taken an international posture. It integrates a variety of postures used by all the cultures in a dignified manner. It is truly a composite of international body language expressing humility, servitude, and obeisance before our Lord.

After cleansing ourselves, we start our prayers by touching our ears, standing with our hands folded and we begin recitations. Then we bow and to make sure we go the same distance, we hold on to our knees. This probably keeps us stable as well. Everyone is not used to doing it like the Japanese, who vary the depth of the bow according to one's status. Then we stand up straight and praise the Lord. Next, we prostrate just like Jesus^{as} did in the garden of Gethsemane and show our ultimate humility and helplessness in front of God. After that we sit with our legs folded and repeat the prostration.

I think there is another reason for all these gestures in addition to the fact that Islam is truly the only international faith so it was prudent and logical that it should have all the positions from all cultures. People in various cultures are used to experience the true feeling of humility and relationship with their God in their particular gesture while praying. A Middle-Eastern feels the utmost satisfaction when he prostrates. An American experiences the feeling of respect and awe in his soul when he is standing with folded hands in front of his Lord. The same applies for all other cultures and their gestures while praying.

Islam gives the chance to anyone who adopts it to experience those feelings since it has a component from each culture. The rest of the gestures may not give one the experience of heartfelt communion with God but one of these positions could do the trick.

However, Islam is not form over substance. The physical position we pray in is not as important as the prayer itself. One can pray sitting, standing, lying flat on his back or on his side and God hears the prayer. The key point is to pray.

While we are talking about the gestures, Muslims face the Ka'abah in Mecca while praying. That unites Muslims all over the world. With the Earth being round, I'm not sure how everyone can face the Ka'abah. I am not a geography expert so I trust Google search will give me the correct *qiblah*. God, the Reader of hearts, knows my intention is to face His House in Mecca.

The Holy Qur'an has stated very clearly that it is not important if we face the East or the West while praying. It states that the real good comes from believing in God with all His helpers i.e. the prophets and angels and serving humanity

especially the relatives, the orphans, the widows, the sick, the travelers and friends who seek help. That is how we reach God in our endeavor to create a bond with Him. That is the key to achieve goodness or if you want to use the religious terminology, righteousness or piety.

Islam offers the ultimate in use of body language to show physically how humble we are in front of our Creator. Physical gestures impact the soul to adopt certain attributes. We experience this all the time. Remember the last time your boss cracked a dumb joke and you forced yourself to laugh? It uplifts your soul. Actors use this technique all the time.

We reach our Lord so long as we have the earnest desire coupled with a spirit that's humbly devoted to God and His commandments, especially the ones about serving others as charity.

Sometimes charity comes in unusual ways...possibly even laughing at your boss's dumb jokes.





To every people have We appointed ways of worship which they observe; so let them not dispute with thee in the matter; and invite thou to thy Lord, for surely, thou followest the right guidance. And if they contend with thee, say, 'Allah knows best what you do. 'Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which you used to differ.'

CH22 R9



Race for Superiority

Throughout history, people have categorized themselves into many groups and classes. A classification is based on the geographical area the person comes from. We say that the person is American, Mexican, Indian, Egyptian, Arabian or Chinese. Then we classify people based on their race such as a person could be Arian white, African black or yellow Chinese. We also classify people based on their religious beliefs, such as a person is a Hindu, Jew, Christian, Muslim or an Atheist. We further sub-classify this category and describe them as Catholics, Presbyterian, Mormon, Sunni and Shia etc. We also have categories based on the political views such as Republican, Democrat, Socialist or Communist. We label people as Liberals or Conservative. There are many other categories to identify groups of people but these are sufficient for now. It should be noted that a human being could be part of many classifications at the same time.

We have also discovered that there are many problems associated with these classifications. Mostly, they are based on the complex of proving ourselves to be superior to others. Jews claimed that they were the chosen people of God and

thus superior to all other races. Hitler tried to establish that it was definitely not the Jews but the White Arian race that was superior to all other races and therefore should reign over the whole world. Jews just claimed a small piece of land in Palestine to be their God given empire. In the process, millions of lives were lost. People who had nothing do with the whole debate also suffered as the Polish, Russians and Americans. At the same time, the White “superior” race felt it was acceptable to enslave the “inferior” race of Blacks. They even justified their actions with references from the Bible.

I don't know why people did not make classifications based on the actions of individuals. They could have classified people as thieves, murderers, adulterers, liars, etc. We attribute some of these evil actions to a whole group of nationalities and religious groups. As the politically incorrect Archie Bunker once said, “You find an honest Italian and you have got something.” Bigots abound everywhere to tell us that all Blacks are lazy and Mexicans are hard working. All Muslims are terrorists and the Irish are drunks.

To me, a thief is a thief is a thief. It does not matter whether he is a Hindu, Muslim or a Jew. He is just a thief. A terrorist is just plain terrorist. Who cares if he claims to be a Christian, Muslim or a Jew? Christian terrorists in Ireland are no different than the terrorists in Serbia, Sri Lanka or Palestine. As soon as we classify them as a religious or political group, a whole mass of people in that class come to their rescue and try to defend them as a matter of honor for their class.

There are many other problems as a result of these classifications. We just have to label a person as a liberal in a majority conservative area and regardless of how righteous that person may be, he is doomed. The opposite is also true. A Republican in a Democrat majority area is facing the same

situation. As a friend of mine said about a person who helped him, “He is a great person, but too bad he is a Republican.”

When the world was small and the travel from one area to other was a gruesome and difficult task, these classifications did not matter much. If an area which was populated with purely white people and they thought they were superior for whatever reason, it was of no consequence to anyone. If Hindus thought that their culture is the oldest and wisest, it did not matter since they were the only ones in India.

With the advent of planes, trains and automobiles, things have changed.

With the world being brought so close together, all these classifications matter. We all have neighbors who are from different nationalities, races, religions and cultures. If you are a white American and there are Jews, Blacks and Asians living in your neighborhood, your claim to being from a superior race is bound to bring trouble. The issue remains to be solved. What do we do about the inherent quest of human beings to be accepted as better than anyone else?

The Holy Qur'an has offered a solution. It says that the most superior among you is the one who excels in righteousness. Under this concept, it is irrelevant if a person is African, American, Chinese or Australian, Republican, Democrat, Liberal or Conservative. He would be superior if he is truthful, honest, a patron of orphans and widows, helpful to travelers and decent with his wife, children and neighbors. We could classify people by these categories of character. The race for superiority on this platform could bring about a change in people for the better. Instead of wishing that one was born as white, black or yellow, we could be classified based on our endeavor and hard work of being righteous.

The Holy Qur'an has also suggested that we should "vie with each other in goodness". Let us compete to see who is more honest, truthful, philanthropic and compassionate to others. It could never end up in killing other innocent human beings in the name of collateral damage. The race for goodness has always taken place in the times of prophets. It brought out communities of people who were truly righteous and brought about remarkable changes in the character of their nations.

I don't know how long it will take us to understand and adopt the system of classifying ourselves based on the principles offered by the Holy Qur'an. We all know the classification system we have been using has become obsolete and is doomed to create more problems and destruction in the future. If the Palestinians and the Jews acted as righteous people, the issue of being a Muslim or a Jew would go away real quick. If the people in Northern and Southern Ireland started acting as righteous, the matter of being Catholics or Protestants will be irrelevant.

I think it is bound to happen. The world will learn it through logical analysis and debate or after destruction of a third world war, killing a few more millions. God has made it easy for us to have knowledge through revelation for our benefit but somehow we don't learn from history. After the Second World War, did Hitler win his claim of superiority of the White race or did the Jews accomplish their mission of living in peace in the Promised Land?

We need to heed to the word of God and stop judging religions for all of our problems. Prophet Jesus^{as} and Prophet Muhammad^{saw} did not teach people to kill each other and be terrorists, murderers, thieves or adulterers. They taught people to be righteous, humble, and helpful, and to take care of their neighbors, the needy, orphans, widows and their own families.

Judge them based on how they and their disciples behaved and brought forth a much better society than they inherited from their forefathers.

Exemplary character is what makes a person superior – not their pedigree, culture nor country. We all need to overcome the superiority complex formed in the isolation age. It is this complex that leads us straight to arrogance. Let us compete in the race to become righteous. It would really discourage the liars, thieves, murderers and terrorists in the society.

It is all up to us.





Successors of God on Earth

Prophet Moses^{as} was standing in the court of the Pharaoh. His request was that the Pharaoh should let his people, the Children of Israel, go freely to their homeland, their Promised Land. The Pharaohs had enslaved the Israelites and treated them harshly. They did not care how many of them perished as long as their construction work on lofty buildings continued at the lowest cost. There is a long history of persecution, cruelty and barbaric treatment towards the Israelites by the Pharaohs. All of this was to be forgotten, put behind them, so that a dark chapter of history could be closed. Prophet Moses^{as} just wanted to take his people and leave peacefully without any revenge, compensation or demands.

People who are treated as animals, slaves and persecuted over centuries fester rage and feelings of hatred and revenge towards their oppressors. Usually, these erupt into an uprising, with some opportunists fueling the flames of those feelings. Demonstrations, destruction and death follow. If everything works, the slaves would be free but at a high cost of life and a long period of fighting and chaos. Prophet Moses^{as} was offering to bypass all of that and peacefully walk away: no revenge, no

compensation and no apology. Why would Moses^{as} do that?

Moses^{as} was a prophet, a successor of God on earth, a *khalifah* of the Merciful and Compassionate God.

We can travel a many centuries further in history and see the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} at the outskirts of Mecca with ten thousand soldiers ready to take over the city, whose residents had persecuted him and his community for 23 years. They had killed his close friends and relatives, mutilated bodies of pious women and men, ridiculed his followers and dragged converts on hot sandy roads. Even when he wanted to get away from it all in peace, they had followed him and put a bounty on his head.

All of this would have been forgotten, closing a dark chapter in history, with all savages forgiven. All the Meccans had to do was lay down their arms and stay inside their homes that day. Then he announced a general amnesty and that there was no blame on them for all the atrocities of the past. They were free and clear of all charges. This was the time of payback; to take revenge, satisfy the feelings of anger built over 23 years. But the 10,000 were saints under the command of Prophet Muhammad^{saw}. Why did Prophet Muhammad^{saw} take the option of forgiveness?

Muhammad^{saw} was a prophet, a successor of God on earth, a *khalifah* of the Merciful and Compassionate God.

We can go back in history of religion for thousands of years and discover that prophets of God have never taught hate and always preferred compassion and love for humanity. It was their enemies and enemies of God who displayed hate and committed hateful crimes against humanity.

Prophet Jesus^{as} preached compassion, turning the other cheek, and giving more than asked. What was wrong with this teaching of compassion and humility? His opponents demanded that he be put on the cross. I think I have made my point.

There are only two kinds of people in this world, children of God and children of Satan. It is up to us to recognize others whether their behavior is that of the children of God or children of Satan. More importantly, we need to assess ourselves whose children are we.

If anyone or any group whether religious, political or ethnic, practices hate, you should know that he does not belong to God. His prophets established this fact over thousands of years. It does not matter whether the person or group propagating hate is Muslim, Christian, Jew or Hindu. None of their prophets preferred hate. The hate mongers belong to the enemies of their prophets who were champions of hate and hateful behavior.

If groups like ISIS , Al-Qaeda , IRA, Nazis, KKK or by any other names profess hate against Christians or Jews, it is in opposition to the behavior of Prophets Muhammad^{saw}, Jesus^{as} and Moses^{as}; especially if they claim to be the *khalifahs* or successors of the Merciful and Compassionate God.

The Holy Qur'an, in Chapter An-Naml, has pointed out how God has provided the mountains, the oceans and rivers, the winds and clouds and all pleasant things for human beings, as well as acceptance of prayers. In the same verses, He mentions that He appoints successors (*khalifahs*) on earth as well. The appointment of successors is mentioned in the list of wonderful things God has bestowed upon mankind. It is through His mercy and compassion that He provides us a

khalifah just as He has provided the necessary and beautiful essentials around us.

Successorship is a blessing for mankind. It cannot have any share of hate, let alone criminal behavior as killing innocents, taking hostages, butchering human beings, destroying property and inciting others to do the same.

In the end, the successorship established by God will always prevail. This is also proven in the history of religion over centuries.

Meanwhile, we can keep on doing the jihad to make sure that we are among the children of God and watch out and stay clear of the children of Satan as they appear for their few days of glory. We also need to spread the word of peace and compassion for fellow human beings among our friends, family and people in our circles of influence. The harder we work at it, the faster the time will come for the Glory of God to be established and the final triumph of peace on earth.





Say ye: 'We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob and his children, and what was given to Moses and Jesus, and what was given to all other Prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between any of them; and to Him we submit ourselves.'

CH2 R16



Freedom of Hypocrisy

In a town in the back hills, a politician was addressing his constituents. In the back of the room was an old man who was hard of hearing. He tried bending his ear, changing his angle of sitting but he could not understand all the words. After about ten minutes into the speech, he was frustrated. He nudged the guy sitting next to him and said, "What's he talking about?" The guy replied in a louder than usual voice so the old man could hear him, "So far, I can't tell."

Politicians are masters of double talk. There are so many reasons why they do it. I could not possibly list them all. I know for sure that they want to let their constituents hear what is appealing to them. Since there always is a difference of opinion among the constituents, so the politicians have to appease both sides. That can only be accomplished by double talk. They have practiced it over centuries and everybody knows it.

The double talk is hypocrisy for whatever purposes it is exercised. It is not limited to politicians.

We have seen examples of hypocrisy in the arena of

freedom of speech as well. Some may call it double standards. No matter what you call it, it is unjust behavior. Knowing full well that one is hiding the truth or manipulating it is not exclusive to any particular society. In the modern times, people have taken shelter under the pretense of freedom of speech to voice their bias. They would apply the freedom of expression as they see fit, with double standards.

These days if an African-American person is ridiculed, they call it racism. If someone insults a Jewish person, it is titled anti-Semitism. When someone attacks a religious group, it is called hate speech. However, when the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} is attacked, verbally or graphically, it is heroically heralded as freedom of speech.

I cannot fathom what possible decent purpose or goal a person would have in mind in insulting or ridiculing a prophet. What possible result would one expect from it other than creating hate and frustration for the people who honor the prophet being attacked? In the case of Muslims, it is even more appalling since as a matter of belief, they would not ridicule or insult any other prophet. It is not as a courtesy or accommodation to other faiths but a matter of their belief. One cannot be a Muslim unless he believes in the truthfulness of all the prophets.

The Holy Qur'an has specifically praised all the prophets and has commanded that our enmity of a people should never drive us to act unjustly. It should never result in insulting and ridiculing their prophets or gods since it would be indecent and unjust. The Holy Qur'an has also expressed that if we were to do that, it would only invite retaliation from the enemies. They would make derogatory remarks about our God, Allah. There is no other outcome that is possible.

Freedom of speech is an excellent concept when it is exercised with decency and care for the emotions of others. Slandering someone's mother may technically qualify as freedom of speech but is it decent? Is it acceptable in a civilized society? Are there any people in the world who would consider it acceptable? I don't think so. What possible reaction would be expected as a result of such remarks? Same is true for insulting, calling names and ridiculing the prophets who are accepted and honored by so many in every part of the world.

We don't need to consult the philosophers and read scriptures to come up with an answer about our double talk, hypocrisy or double standards. We just have to ask our own conscience and we all know its reply. The response will be quick and clear. Just don't argue with it or try to justify your behavior against it. If, God forbid, your conscience agrees with the hypocrisy and unjust behavior, then you have got much bigger problems.

Meanwhile, Muslims need to obey the commandments of the Holy Qur'an. When such remarks are made in a meeting or gathering, leave that place until the subject changes. That is precisely what we are commanded to do. Nothing more. We could certainly pray for the people making indecent remarks.

That is a suggestion that promotes goodwill towards all: pray for each other.





Serving the Wayfarer

In hot climate countries, it is a custom to take a nap at midday. In Central American countries it is known as a siesta and in the sub-continent of India it is referred to as *qailoola*. In my teenage years, I could never get used to the inactivity at noon. Maybe my energy level abhorred it. Maybe my body was accustomed to resting at night and daytime rest was not beneficial. Regardless of the reason, when the rest of the family members were taking the nap or pretending to, I was fully awake and had nothing to do. Under the hot sun at 110 to 114 degrees Fahrenheit everyone in the neighborhood was in closed doors.

One of these hot days in June, I was sitting in my room. The window was open so I could feel the breeze. The breeze was hot but it kept drying the perspiration. I had clear view of the lonely road that passed through our town. On both sides of the road was just dirt. There was one tree on the other side of the road. That was the only shade around as far as I could see. There were no trees between the house and the road so I had a very clear view of the road.

Every few minutes, a truck or a bus would pass through on the road. There were very few cars in those days so most of the road's traffic consisted of buses and trucks. You could not see anyone walking under the sun at that time of day. I was just sitting and gazing and all of a sudden a bus stopped on the road right across from the house. Passengers got off the bus. There was no bus stop there so it was unusual that a bus would stop especially in that heat. I knew there was some trouble.

The bus had a flat tire so everyone got off and found a place under the shadow of the bus. A few walked to the lonely tree and stood under its shade.

I figured everyone must be thirsty. I took a pale, filled it with water and got some ice from the thermos and threw in it. Yes, it is true; we did not have a refrigerator in our home just like everyone else in the neighborhood. I walked towards the disabled bus and started to offer a drink of water to the passengers. They were happy to see me, or should I say the cool water, since there was no air conditioning in the bus. The June heat of 110 degrees sure can drive up your thirst.

I noticed that one of the passengers, a villager from his attire, would come close to me only to observe and then turn around and walk away. He wouldn't ask for water but kept on circling around me with curiosity. Meanwhile, I ran out of water. I went to the house filled up the pale again and threw the rest of the ice from the thermos into it. I figured when the family wakes up and finds the thermos empty, they would just send someone to get more ice. In a big family, no one could tell who used what and when.

I came back to the bus and saw the man again. This time when he got close to me, I asked him if he wanted a glass of water.

He asked, "How much is it?"

I answered, "There is no charge for it. I am just helping out and figured the passengers would be thirsty."

So he took the glass of water and thanked me.

That is when it dawned upon me. He was thirsty all along, but he wanted to see if I was charging people for the water and how much. Maybe he didn't have enough money which was not unusual for villagers. Maybe he didn't believe in paying for water.

The bus left after its tire was replaced but the man had such an impact on me that I never forgot his face or his facial expressions.

I started to think what kind of society am I living in? A person has a hard time believing that someone would offer free water to stranded passengers on a scorching hot day. Or that he would think that there are people among us who would take advantage of the situation and sell water.

It was even more troublesome for me since Muslims have been taught to serve the travelers, or the "wayfarers" in the terminology of the Holy Qur'an. I don't know exactly how many verses are in the Holy Qur'an about taking care of the wayfarers but I have counted at least 8.

In the old days, people used to travel on foot or on horses and camel from one city to another. They had no hotels and motels but wherever they stopped at sunset, locals offered them food and drinks. It was hospitality, and people were proud

to do it. With the advent of hotels, motels and bed and breakfast places, the world's culture has changed. However, the wayfarer still has rights to expect hospitality under the commandments of God in the Holy Qur'an. Generally, hospitality is to be granted for three days.^o

It was wonderful when people entertained strangers, made new acquaintances, got news about foreign lands, exchanged thoughts and, most of all, pleased God by following His commandment.

Nowadays, people in hotels and motels serve the wayfarers in expectation of tips. They get the news from cable channels and don't want to exchange thoughts for fear of exposing themselves. Making friends with strangers is not worth the risk anymore. Pleasing God, of course, is on the bottom of the list...and that's if it even makes the list.

I hope things are different now in my town. I know there are trees on both sides of the lonely road. I know, for sure, that there are people who would serve the wayfarer food and beverages without charge. I am just not sure if the society has accepted the fact that there are people who would take care of the wayfarer and would not be suspicious of their intentions, such as taking money from stranded passengers.

I also hope that the man did not get stranded again only to find that he'd have to pay to quench his thirst. That would not only be an omen for him, but the society which deprived him of his God-given rights.





And worship Allah and associate naught with Him,
and show kindness to parents, and to kindred, and
orphans, and the needy, and to the neighbour that
is a kinsman and the neighbour that is a stranger,
and the companion by your side, and the **wayfarer**,
and those whom your right hands possess. Surely,
Allah loves not the proud and the boastful

CH4 R6



Supreme Abomination

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the legality of same sex marriages in a recent landmark decision. The decision has political, moral, religious and social implications. One can only imagine the disappointment and grief this ruling gave the right wing Christians and the Jews of America, but the situation begs the deeper question of who we are as a people and what we truly believe.

Christians make up approximately 71% of the American population and Jews approximately 2%, according to a 2014 survey by the Pew Research Center. So the decision was made by the US Supreme Court of USA against the explicit religious beliefs of 73% of its population. Theoretically, the majority rules in a democracy. You count the votes in a democracy, not weigh their opinion. This is one occasion this general rule failed to apply.

I cannot imagine that 73% of the population was in its favor. The Bible, which is considered the Word of God by Christians, clearly describes homosexuality as immoral and sinful. The Old Testament part of the Bible, the sacred

document of the Jews, does the same. In Leviticus 20:13, we read, "If a man also lie with a male, as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them." In Corinthians 6:9-10 we read, "Do you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the Kingdom of God."

Maybe there is confusion about what "Word of God" means. I thought it meant, the Truth--the verdict and guiding principle from the Almighty, the Wise and the All-Knowing.

I further started to think about Sodom and Gomorrah. A story which is described in the Bible to point out the destruction that took place. God destroyed entire cities as punishment for homosexual behavior and the immoral acts perpetrated in defiance of God's commandments.

Christians actually have gone through a lot of pain to research and analyze historically to prove that Sodom and Gomorrah were real cities and actual devastation took place. So how does the Supreme Court decision fit into this story? Is this a step closer to inviting the wrath of God? By the way, the story of destruction of the people of the Prophet Lot^{as} is confirmed by the Holy Qur'an as well. Although the Holy Qur'an does not specify a particular punishment for homosexuals as does the Bible, the minority population of Muslims in the USA stand opposed to homosexuality as well.

Another disappointment for the Christian and Jewish faiths lies in the fact that there was no opposing reaction by the Legislature. Christians and Jews make up more than 95% of members of congress, a higher percentage than the 73% among

the total population. Again, under democracy, the legislative branch represents the majority of the population and the principles they stand for. Had Congress passed a law restricting gay marriage, the Supreme Court judges' opinion would be restricted to interpreting the law. The obvious conclusion is that either the legislators do not represent the views of the American people, or the American people don't accept the views of the faiths they claim to be. Congress could also address the issues relating to benefits and rights of all households regardless of marital status. So the status of one's marriage would not be a factor in the tax code or other regulations. There are ways to address the issues without breaking the laws of God.

One explanation could be that the representatives in Congress have political and economic reasons not to honor the religious and moral principles of the people they are supposed to represent. A congressman gets elected after spending enormous amounts of money. That just buys him a two year term. So as soon as he is in office, his first priority is to come up with enough funds so he can get re-elected. With the way the campaigns run these days, he only has one year to do it, since the second year will be taken up by political speeches, fund-raising for the party, begging for votes and kissing babies on the campaign trail. By the end of the second year the same cycle will start all over again. So the inevitable conclusion will be that he represents the people who provide him funds to run for elections every two years. It is not that important whether they are homosexuals or firm believers of Christianity or Judaism. The followers of Islam are not in any numbers to be concerned about.

God's punishment does not come that quickly. Sodom and Gomorrah did not invite destruction because there were homosexuals among them. They have been discreetly present in all nations and in all parts of the world; no different than

adulterers, sexual perverts and prostitutes. The destruction comes when a whole nation gets involved and supports the violation of commandments of God in open defiance to His Word. When an entire nation explicitly declares and practices the violation of His commandments as “normal behavior,” it essentially props itself up as a god beside God, and challenges Him to establish His true authority over His creation.

As far as my own disappointment as a Muslim, it is understandable. I am a member of a small minority in the USA, constituting less than 1% of the population. We simply can't make changes in laws within this democracy because our meagre numbers don't allow it. We could make some noise and let our opinion known, but that is about it.

Disappointment of Christians and Jews is difficult to comprehend. Maybe they don't believe in their faiths as the Truth anymore. Maybe they feel it is not practical or applicable anymore. Maybe they believe (God forbid) that five judges on the Supreme Court panel are wiser than God. That would be an even bigger abomination than the verdict of the Supreme Court approving the same sex marriages; a supreme abomination.





And thy Lord would not destroy the cities unjustly
while the people thereof were righteous.

CH11 R10

And how many a city have We destroyed, while it
was given to wrongdoing, so that it is fallen down
on its roofs; and how many a deserted well and lofty
castle!

CH22 R6

KEEP



RIGHT

Commandment of Admonition

I sat down to pen this piece but couldn't think of what to write. I then began thinking that, over the centuries, writers, thinkers, scholars, philosophers, and commentators have written on nearly all the subjects. They have analyzed and given advice on just about every topic. There is almost nothing that you can write, about which something has not already been written. All that people do is reiterating what has already been said. They put it in different words, put a twist on it here and there, and make it look like a new piece. People who are intoxicated with the exuberance of their own verbosity write so they can impress readers with their knowledge of words—and confuse many of us in the process.

As it relates to the present issue, I started to think that even marriage counselors just repeat what has already been said. Nothing that they say is new, or not already known to warring couples. So why even do it? How many books have been written on this subject alone and how many pastors and community leaders have repeated the same advice over the centuries. What can anyone add? What is the point of counseling when couples already know what they are supposed to be doing?

That's when something clicked in my mind. I thought of two short chapters in the Holy Qur'an: chapter 87, named *Al-A'la* and chapter 88, named *Al-Ghashiah*. These are two chapters that the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} recited regularly in the Friday prayers and Eid prayers. In other words, at the largest gathering of Muslims every week and twice a year, he recited these two chapters to them repeatedly. He was trying to instill something in the minds of Muslims through these two chapters.

In reflecting upon these chapters, it is fascinating to note that out of nearly fifty verses there is only one commandment. Chapter 87 says, "So, keep on admonishing people. Surely, admonition is, indeed, profitable." Chapter 88 repeats this same command: "Admonish, therefore, for thou art but an admonisher." The rest of the verses in these chapters are glorification of God and a wonderful description of His creation in this world and the next. The Holy Qur'an is full of admonitions, and repeats advice throughout. We know that it worked in transforming millions of people over the last fourteen centuries. It is important to practice what you profess.

The commandment to admonish, to do good and shun evil, is directly given to Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} in these verses. However, as his followers, this commandment applies to us as well. We have to keep on repeating the admonitions and give advice over and over again because God has told us that it will be fruitful and profitable. It pays off at the end.

Let me share one example to illustrate. When I was growing up, our teacher would tell us that we should respect our parents. When we got home, our parents repeatedly told us that we must respect our teachers. If you insulted the teacher, he slapped you. When you got home and your father found out

about it, you got another slap from him. It didn't take me long to figure out that they were in cahoots with one another—bent on getting our respect and obedience for their own aims. That's what I thought, until I grew old enough to understand the sermons of the Imam in the mosque. The Imam would tell us that it is the Holy Qur'an that states that you must take care of, and be obedient to your parents. The Imam also taught us that the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} stated that even if you learn one word from someone, respect him because he is your teacher. Well, that placed respect for a full-time teacher on a whole different level.

Now, I knew that pastors were also in cahoots with parents and teachers! I was just a teenager trying to live my life. But there was no escape, since my whole life revolved around the home, school, and mosque. We refer to those days as “the good old days.”

In the Western society, in the last few decades, teachers and student counselors began telling teenagers that they didn't have to listen to their parents. They now tell them, “You have to think for yourself. Your parents are not any smarter than you are. They too have done a lot of bad things. They are not any better than you are.” This has resulted in teenagers losing respect for their parents, since they didn't need to listen to them or their advice and admonition. What teachers didn't realize was that, in the process, they also lost all respect for themselves. The bond between the teachers and parents disappeared. Pastors and Imams are the distant third now. With around 28% of the American population now atheists, employment opportunities for clergy have been severely affected.

I suggest to everyone that they should give advice and admonish people to do good works and avoid evil actions. We need to do it because God has decreed that it will bring results.

So let us not worry about repeating ourselves. That is part of the process.

I am glad my writer's block and resulting thought process led me to write about this topic. I am also certain that others have already written about it. But so what! I have the right to admonish people as the next guy. And I am sure it will help someone out there. You should also admonish and perhaps it will help someone too.





Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and
goodly exhortation, and argue with them in a way
that is best. Surely, thy Lord knows best who has
strayed from His way; and He knows those who are
rightly guided.

CH16 R16

References (Holy Qur'an)

Note: References are given with Chapter name, chapter number and *Ruku* number. The Holy Qur'an is organized through chapters (*Surahs*), Parts (total of 30 parts) and *Rukus*. *Ruku* is equivalent to a paragraph based on the subject matter. This will give the readers an opportunity to read the particular *Ruku* of the Holy Qur'an from which the verse has been quoted. In addition to the blessings of reading the verses of the Holy Qur'an, it will give the reader understanding of the context in which referenced verse was revealed.

All Inclusive Thanksgiving

1. AL-FURQAN (CH. 25) RUKU 6
2. AL-BAQARAH (CH. 2) RUKU 15
3. AL-NAML, (CH. 27) RUKU 2
4. AL-MUMTAHANAH, (CH. 60) RUKU 1
5. NOOH, (CH. 71) RUKU 2
6. AL-MAI'DAH, (CH. 5) RUKU 4
7. TAHA, (CH. 20, RUKU 3
8. AL-FATIHA, (CH. 1) RUKU 1

Changing the World

9. AL-AN'AM, (CH. 6) RUKU 20

Red Light Shopping

10. AL-BAQARAH, (CH. 2) RUKU 37

Sin, the “S” Word

11. LUQMAN, (CH. 31) RUKU 2

Apes and Angels

12. AL-BAQARAH, (CH. 2) RUKU 4

13. AL-KAHF, (CH. 18) RUKU 7

14. AL-BAQARAH, (CH. 2) RUKU 4

Missing the Window

15. AL-TAUBAH, (CH.9) RUKU 10

So Far So Good

16. AL-KAHF, (CH.18) RUKU 5

17. AL-KAHF, (CH. 18) RUKU 5

Celebrating Thanksgiving

18. LUQMAN, (CH. 31) RUKU 2

Monstrous Freedom

19. AL-KAHF, (CH. 18) RUKU 1

20. AL-NISA, (CH. 4) RUKU 22

Hail to the Chief

- 21. SHURA, (CH. 42) RUKU 4
- 22. AL-NISA, (CH. 4) RUKU 8
- 23. TAHA, (CH. 20) RUKU 7
- 24. AL-MAI'DAH, (CH. 5) RUKU 1

Who is In-charge?

- 25. BANI-ISRA'IL, (CH. 17) RUKU 9
- 26. AL-NISA, (CH. 4) RUKU 6

Non-Productive Critique

- 27. HUD, (CH.11) RUKU 2

The Blame Game

- 28. AL-RUM, (CH. 30) RUKU 5

Following the Forefathers

- 29. AL-BAQARAH, (CH. 2) RUKU 21

Bird Brains

- 30. AL-AN'AM, (CH. 6) RUKU 4
- 31. AL-NISA, (CH. 4) RUKU 14
- 32. AL-ANKABUT, (CH. 29) RUKU 6

News Media Hustlers

- 33. AL-AHZAB, (CH. 33) RUKU 71

Age of MIS-Information

34. AL-NISA, (CH. 4) RUKU 11

35. AL-GHASHIYA, (CH. 88) RUKU 1

Pride of Success

36. AL-ZUMAR, (CH. 39) RUKU 5

Prayer Legislation

37. AL-IMRAN, (CH 3) RUKU 7

Worship Gestures

38. AL-BAQARAH, (CH 2) RUKU 6

References (Bible)

Who is In-charge?

Numbers Ch. 30: 3 “When a young woman still living in her father’s house makes a vow to the LORD or obligates herself by a pledge 4 and her father hears about her vow or pledge but says nothing to her, then all her vows and every pledge by which she obligated herself will stand. 5 But if her father forbids her when he hears about it, none of her vows or the pledges by which she obligated herself will stand; the LORD will release her because her father has forbidden her. 6 “If she marries after she makes a vow or after her lips utter a rash promise by which she obligates herself 7 and her husband hears about it but says nothing to her, then her vows or the pledges by which she obligated herself will stand. 8 But if her husband forbids her when he hears about it, he nullifies the vow that obligates her or the rash promise by which she obligates herself, and the LORD will release her.

Romans Ch. 7: 2 For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.

Ephesias Ch. 5: 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

1 Peter Ch. 3: 1 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,

Non-Productive Critique

b) **Deuteronomy** Ch. 20: 13 When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. 14 As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the LORD your God gives you from your enemies. 15 This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby. 16 However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. 17 Completely destroy them--the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites--as the LORD your God has commanded you. 18 Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God. 19 When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees of the field people, that you should besiege them? 20 However, you may cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them to build siege works until the city at war with you falls.

References (Hadith)

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“Straight Talk” is the translation of the Holy Qur’an words of “Qoulay Sadeed”. Unlike plain truth, straight talk is without play on words, clear-cut, precise and through which the message is given in a righteous manner.

“In the cover of freedom of speech, some have misused this precious value. I am not referring to just the pornographic literature and movies. I am talking about the indecent expressions in areas of religion and politics. I know that we cannot win any debate with any of the culprits on the principle of the First Amendment. However, we can discuss it on the basis of decency.”



Falahud Din Shams has sculpted prose on one of the most fascinating but neglected subjects by writing “Straight Talk”. Falah is an entrepreneur, spent most of his career in financial management but he is also an Islamic scholar. Falah has pen this book for the young generation of our era. It is written in such a way that shows respect to often neglected youth with his engaging, accessible and exciting way, crucially demystifying many misgivings about the Islamic teachings by maintaining the interest of the reader with humor, compassion and easy erudition.

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In years to come our race will still reference this book and uncover new things. Falah has properly cleansed the water and nurtured the young and future leaders of our time. By doing so he has provided plentiful well researched references which demand our praise and prayers for his outstanding service to humanity.